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**MOTIVATIONS TO STAY WITH THE HOME COMPANY AFTER
THE INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENT: A REPATRIATE'S
PERSPECTIVE**

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Master of Science in Human Resources and Organizational Consulting

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Quantitative Methods for Management and Economics, ISCTE Business
School

October, 2020



BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Department of Human Resources and Organizational Behavior

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Resumo

O objetivo desta tese é identificar as motivações que influenciam a decisão do repatriado em ficar com a empresa de origem após completar a sua missão internacional para intender os fatores relevantes a incluir no programa de repatriação de uma organização, a fim de evitar a saída voluntária de repatriados e aumentar a retenção dos repatriados.

A fim de recolher provas empíricas, foi realizado um total de 8 entrevistas qualitativas com repatriados. As provas empíricas foram posteriormente comparadas com o quadro teórico, utilizando uma abordagem indutiva, a fim de encontrar padrões de semelhanças ou disparidades.

Os resultados sugerem que a vontade dos repatriados em permanecerem comprometidos com a empresa de origem é influenciada por uma conjugação de fatores individuais e organizacionais que têm de ser vistos como um todo. Os principais fatores que ajudam a reter o repatriado incluem: Motivação para ir para o estrangeiro, expectativas relacionadas com o trabalho no regresso, traços de personalidade, apoio da empresa, características da empresa e contacto regular entre a empresa de origem e a empresa anfitriã. Os repatriados afirmam que querem sentir-se apreciados, valorizados, e esperam que a empresa forneça apoio durante o reajustamento, que muitas vezes se torna mais difícil que o ajustamento no estrangeiro. Do ponto de vista dos repatriados, as empresas devem prestar atenção à disponibilização de um programa de repatriação antes de irem para o estrangeiro, que compreenda as necessidades dos repatriados e se concentre no alinhamento da motivação com as expectativas.

Palavras-chave: Repatriação, retenção, motivação, expectativas, apoio à empresa, programa de repatriação

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the motives that influence a repatriate's decision to stay with the home company after completing their international assignment. The goal is to find the factors relevant to include in an organization's repatriation program in order to avoid repatriation turnover and in fact increase repatriate retention.

In order to collect empirical evidence, a total number 8 qualitative interviews have been conducted with repatriates who decided to stay with the home company after repatriation. The empirical evidence has thereafter been compared to the theoretical framework by utilizing an inductive approach in order to find patterns of similarities or disparities.

The results suggest that the willingness of the returnees to remain committed to the home company is influenced by a combination of individual and organizational factors that have to be seen as a whole. The main factors that help to retain repatriates include: Motivation to go abroad, work related expectations upon return, personality traits, company support, company characteristics and regular contact between the home and host company. Repatriates state that they want to feel appreciated, valued, and expect the company to provide support during the readjustment, which often becomes more difficult than adjusting abroad. From the returnees' point of view, companies should pay attention by providing a repatriation program before going abroad that understands the returnees' needs and focuses on aligning motivation with expectations.

Keywords: Repatriation, retention, motivation, expectations, company support, repatriation program

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List of Abbreviations

MNCs = Multinational corporations

MNEs = Multinational Enterprises

HR = Human Resources Management

IHRM = International Human Resources Management

IC = Interview Candidate

IA = International Assignment

FSE = Foreign Service Employee

URT = Uncertainty reduction theory

1. Introduction

Multinational corporations (MNCs) claim that the greatest benefit of successful repatriation is having an increase in international competence. At the same time however, various MNCs state that the low retention rate of international assignees during repatriation is their biggest concern (Baruch et al, 2002; Black & Gregersen, 1999 and Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). A significant number of repatriates leave the home organization in 1 to 2 years following repatriation. To put this issue into context, a study conducted by Grant (1997) indicates that 15% of US repatriates leave their company within 12-18 months after returning home, increasing to 40% after 3 years. In a more recent study, results show that 38% of repatriates leave their home country enterprise within the first year of repatriation (Kraimer et al., 2012). Brookfield Relocation Trends Report from 2016 reveals that 14% of MNCs experienced an increase in repatriation turnover, 12% indicated a decrease and 75% saw no change (Brookfield Global Relocation, 2016). This in turn, implies diverse implications for an organization.

Firstly, a high repatriate attrition rate threatens a firm's ability to develop fundamental international attractiveness, simply because it complicates the process of finding another potential candidate who wants to take up a foreign assignment (Dowens and Thomas, 1999). Secondly, companies lose the repatriate's skills and knowledge, including the one he or she gained through the international assignment (Bossard & Peterson, 2005). Especially in today's business world, organizations are continuously trying to improve their level of knowledge exploration and exploitation (Levitt & March, 1988). It is stated that the knowledge managers gain on international assignments is crucial for the capacity of a firm to establish competitive advantage in the global market (Canestrino & Magliocca, 2010). Losing this highly valuable employees, results in additional competitive disadvantage (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Thirdly, by taking into consideration the substantial cost of training and compensation for each expatriate that is sent abroad, turnover among repatriates represent a substantial financial burden for many Multinational Enterprises (MNEs). Foreign assignments are costly. An expatriate package can include benefits amount to expenditures from up to 1 million US Dollars annually. With an average international assignment duration of 2-5 years, organizations risk to lose up to 5 million US Dollars by losing only one single repatriate (Black & Mendenhall, 1989). Accordingly, ineffective retention of repatriates is a lost investment for companies and can result in huge losses of revenues (NeryKjerfve & McLean, 2012). Both scholars and practitioners have failed to adequately tackle the problem of high attrition rates among repatriates (Tung, 1987; Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

In this sense focusing on repatriation retention is essential to the organization's growth and profitability (Reiche et al., 2011). Retention of expatriates is especially valuable for business opportunities in global markets (NeryKjerfve & McLean, 2012). Literature argues that the planning process for the repatriate's re-entry should start well in advance of the return due to the fact that repatriates are vulnerable to face diverse issues during repatriation (Andreason and Kinneer, 2005; Skimutis & Verschuur, 2011; Biemann & Braakmann, 2013). Since literature lacks evidence in explaining why the attrition rate of repatriates remains high, and practices used by companies to successfully retain repatriates are still not effective enough, the goal of this paper is to provide a better understanding of the nature and scope of the repatriate retention process. Thereby, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the motives that determine a repatriate to stay with the home company after successful completion of an international assignment. In this sense the author aims to explore the reasons that impact the decision making process of a repatriate to stay committed to his home company instead of deciding to quit as likely close colleagues of him or her would do or have done. Based on a theoretical framework, the authors goal is to identify these motives as well as to make recommendations on what aspects companies should pay attention when designing their repatriation program. This study may help to improve the awareness and practice of business regarding the main complications faced during repatriation by repatriates and how companies can be proactive in their efforts to retain vital staff. Companies who indicate low retention rates among their repatriates, can use this study to gather information regarding what is important to employees who stayed in the company in order to make changes in their processes and implement policies that reflect repatriates needs. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to answer the following research question:

“What motivates repatriates to stay with the home company after completing their international assignment?”

To empirically investigate the above question a qualitative research approach of primary and secondary data is used. The first part of the thesis incorporates the main theoretical framework, which is divided into four topics. First of all, the author will make clear what importance international assignments have. Thereby explaining the lifecycle of an IA as well as why companies make use of them. Secondly, the significance of repatriation, as the closing phase of an international assignment is being discussed. Thirdly, four main individual factors including readjustment, motivation, expectations and personality are deconstructed in detail.

Lastly, contextual organizational determinants of repatriation retention are being enlightened. Following, the process of data collection is explained. Afterwards the collected primary data is presented in the findings section. The findings will be linked to the theories and literature with respect to confirmation and refinement in the discussion chapter. To end, a brief conclusion of the findings and analysis is given by also referring to limitations and recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

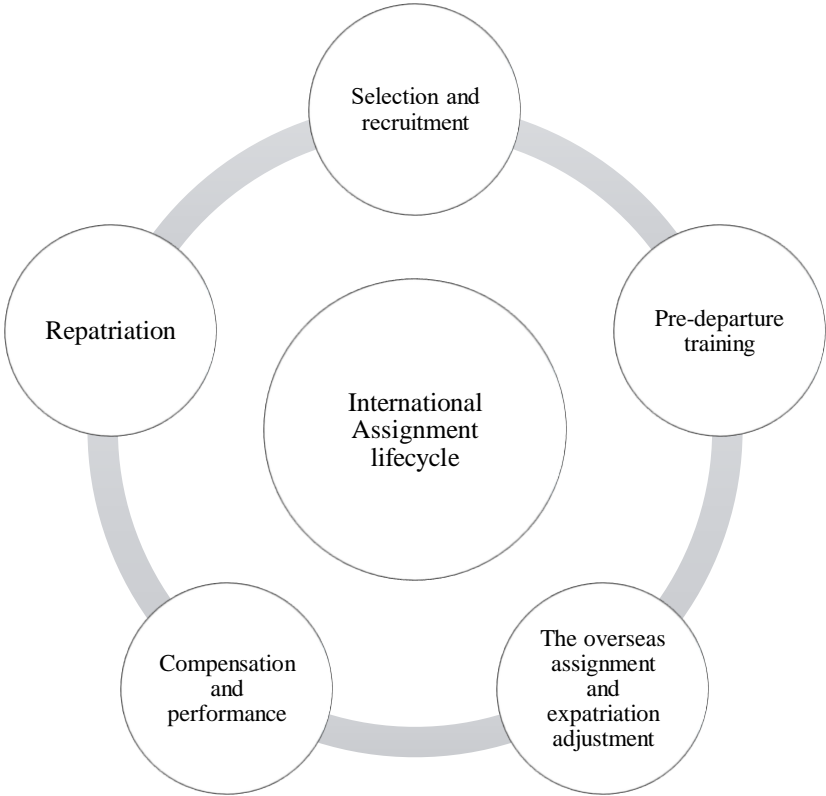
The second chapter of this thesis contains the theoretical framework. Chapter 2. 1 starts with providing an understanding of the international assignment life cycle by illustrating the stages as well as introducing three existing types of assignments. Afterwards emphasis will be put on the importance of the repatriation process. Following the author presents some issues related to repatriation and explains the significance of repatriate's retention. Thereby several repatriate retention theories will be elaborated. After the theoretical framework the method of data collection and research design is explained in much detail.

2.1. The international assignment cycle

International assignments, also referred to as foreign/overseas assignment or international placement. It typically starts with sending an employee (expatriate) abroad (expatriation) to work in a company's foreign subsidiary and is finalized when the employee (repatriate) returns home to the parent firm or headquarter upon completion of the assignment (repatriation) (Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Vidal, Valle & Aragón, 2007). An expatriate is termed as: "one who works and lives in a foreign country but remains citizen of the country where the employing organization is head quartered" (Deresky, 2003, p. 511). Traveling around the world for business purposes puts expatriates in a position of being managerial facilitators, technical experts, controllers and developers of operations with the result of strengthening company's capabilities and their own ones (Bergstedt & Lundström, 2003). Overseas assignments can further be classified according to the variations in the length of the assignment such as Short-term-, Extended-, and Long-term-assignment. The traditional international placement however, has a duration of one to three years (Tahvanainen et al., 2005,). If expatriates return home before the planned period of the assignment, literature states that this is the consequence of ineffective expatriate management and regarded as expatriate failure (Dowling et al. 2017). An international placement can be described as consisting of five main elements: 1) Selection and

recruitment, 2) pre-departure training 3) the overseas assignment and expatriation adjustment 4) compensation and performance 5) repatriation (Dowling, Welch & Schuler, 1999; Scullion & Brewster, 2001; Tung, 1988).

Figure 2.1: International Assignment Lifecycle



Source: Own illustration based on Dowling, Welch & Schuler, 1999

Selection & recruitment, is considered to be the initial phase, in which the corporation works towards defining and locating the most suitable employee to ensure successful overseas performance. Thereby companies, pay attention on both technical skills and knowledge as well as human relation variables within the high potential candidate (Dowling et al, 1999; Tung, 1988). Research shows that assignment failure occurs due to various factors including poor expatriate selection in the recruitment phase which can result in premature return of expatriates (Yan, Zhu & Hall, 2002).

The *pre-departure training* phase is regarded as highly critical for the actual success of the assignment. Depending on the nature of the international operation, the role taken in the new

job position, the extent of interaction with host nationals, cross-cultural differences and language skills will determine the complexity of pre-departure trainings. Common training programs are preliminary visits together with the family, informal briefings as well as cultural awareness workshops (Scullion & Brewster, 2001, Dowling et al, 1999).

The *overseas assignment and expatriation adjustment* phase is strongly affected by the individual's attitude towards the assignment and his or her sensitivity to cultural differences. Accordingly, it is deeply connected to the first stage of the assignment, by choosing the best candidate (Scullion & Brewster, 2001). *Compensation and performance* elements are interconnected too. Bonache et al (2001, p.10) claims that compensation is "*a pivotal control and incentive mechanisms that can be flexibly used by the management to achieve business objectives*". Performance, involves careful measurement such as formal performance evaluation systems.

The final stage, *repatriation*, is defined as the process of reintegrating returning employees into the home company and home environment. Considerable research has been made to understand the problems of effective expatriate management in terms of the above mentioned phases. However, companies tend to overlook that international assignments are cycles that are not to be treated as completed when expatriates are abroad, but rather to be only concluded when the repatriate has successfully re-entered and readjusted the home company. Research points out that repatriation is to be treated as a simultaneously important element of the whole international assignment cycle. It is claimed that it is of high importance to not consider expatriation and repatriation as two separated and independent operations but rather to view repatriation as a closing of the loop phase that ensures a positive outcome for the employer and the employee (Paik et al. 2002; Redman & Wilkinson, 2006). For an international assignment to become a success, organizations have to ensure commitment and support the expatriate during the entire life cycle of the assignment. Research suggests, that effective global placements need to follow a logically developed plan while considering all phases and elements as interconnected (Harzing & Ruysseveldt, 1995).

2.1.1. Types of international assignments

Due to the expansion of domestic and international markets, improved communication technology as well as converging consumer habits and tastes, environmental and economic turbulences are increasing. To handle the influx of international competition, international assignments have become a critical competitive asset for organizations (Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall, 1992). The transfer of human resources around international functions and

operations is recognised as a key method for growing the organization's capabilities (Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Paik, Segaud & Malinowski, 2002; Stevens, Oddou, Furuya, Bird & Mendenhall, 2006; Vidal, Valle & Aragón 2007, Yan, Zhu & Hall, 2002). In fact, international transfers provide enterprises with the opportunity to not only gain international leadership expertise but also to obtain knowledge about specific market insights and how to do business with international customers and suppliers (Reisig, 2017).

With the goal of becoming competitive, nearly 80% of multinational companies send expatriates abroad (Black and Gregersen, 1999). In addition, Cox, Khan & Armani (2013) argue that the use of an expatriate is expected to grow by 65% with the next decade. As the use of international assignments is highly important for companies, so are there diverse factors that affect an employee's motivation to take up an international assignment. In their article on international assignment objectives, Edström and Galbraith (1977) have identified three principals regarding company motives for the global transfer of managers. Firstly, filling positions that cannot be staffed locally due to the lack of employees with insufficient managerial and technical skills abroad is what companies understand under Functional and Technical Assignments (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Under Developmental Assignments Scholars understand: Organizational development by supporting and coordinating international operation through socialization and informal networks (Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Paik, Segaud & Malinowski, 2002; Stevens, Oddou, Furuya, Bird & Mendenhall, 2006; Vidal, Valle & Aragón 2007, Yan, Zhu & Hall, 2002). Lastly, strategic assignments compromise the management development by enabling high potential talent to gain important international experience. Figure 2.2. illustrates the above mentioned types of international assignments by focusing on what types of employees are being used to cover the objective of the foreign assignment.

Figure 2.2. Types of International Assignments

Functional and Technical Assignments	Developmental Assignments	Strategic Assignments
<p>Expatriates are usually used in key positions to transfer skills and knowldge and/or control overseas subsidiary in certain aspects</p> <p>Typically selected employees from different kind of organizational levels</p>	<p>Sending expatriate sabroad to gain international capabilities (cross-cultural understanding and development of leadership skills in regard to global experience)</p> <p>Typically young professionals such as junior and mid-level employees</p>	<p>Focuses on high potential talent to gain international knowledge and experience necessary for the company to maintain competitive advantage</p> <p>Gaining new skills has secondary importance</p>

Source: Own illustration based on Edström and Galbraith, 1977

Nonetheless, one should bear in mind that an employee's reason or motive to accept an international assignment is normally distinct to the company's reason. Research provides evidence that different types of Foreign Service Employees (FSEs) have different motives for accepting an overseas assignment as well as perceived negative effects for refusing the foreign placement and the expected rewards for successfully finalizing an International Assignment (IA). There exist different influencing forces that can both push the individual, such as poor career prospects in the home country or high pressure from the company to accept the IA or pull factors, such as intrinsic interest in foreign cultures or specific features of the position offered (Baruch, 2002; Brewster & Suutari, 2005; Suutari, 2003). Without doubt, do these influencing factors involve specific career aspirations, motives, needs, life stage, family situation of employee and also job characteristics (Baruch, 2002; Brewster & Suutari, 2005; Suutari, 2003). Nevertheless, can the motivation factor also be of crucial significance on the psychological contract of a repatriate when he or she takes the decision to stay with the company or to leave after successfully completing the overseas assignment (Edström and Galbraith, 1977).

2.2. Significance of Repatriation

The manner in which MNCs handle repatriation will affect their ability to attract future expatriates to accept a foreign assignment as well as affecting the ability to retain returning or

already returned repatriates (Dowling et al., 2017). By definition repatriation refers to the termination of an international assignment and is the activity of transferring the expatriate back to the home country and therefore the final phase of the international assignment life cycle (Menzies and Lawrence, 2011). Repatriates are defined as those employees returning from a foreign assignment (Lee, Liu, 2007; Benson & Pattie, 2008; Kulkarni et al. 2010). Repatriation focus is usually on re-entry and re-adjustment. Since repatriates only have to adjust to their home country, which is considered as a familiar place, companies give less attention, especially in comparison to the expatriation phase.

However, reality shows that the adjusting processes to a familiar environment, often proves to be a challenge for returning employees (Redman and Wilkinson, 2006). A study conducted with 287 companies found out that fifty-two percent of the sampled firms experienced readjustment issues during the repatriation phase (Kulkarni et al., 2010; Lee and Liu, 2007). Reverse culture shock, career demands and organizational changes are often poorly managed by organizations due to the lack of understanding. Although 94% of the organizations stated in the GRTS report (2013) claimed they had a repatriation dialogue with their expatriates before returning back to the home country, it was also claimed that only 71% of the companies have a formal repatriation policy as a part of the global assignment policy. Another study conducted by Talent Management and the Changing Assignee Profile (2013) claims that 58% of the surveyed firms declared to not have a formal repatriation integration policy. It further was indicated that the main reasons why companies do not make use of repatriation programs was the lack of perceived value and cost considerations. As organizations continue to grow globally, repatriation will be as important, if not more, to the organization and the expatriate, thus it needs to be a more strategic part of the organizational human resources plan. Currently it indicates a lack of attention given to repatriation. Low retention rates and in contrast high attrition rates in regard to repatriates underline the lack of importance, companies put on the repatriation process (Fischlmayr & Kollinger, 2010; Gupta, 2013).

2.3. Repatriation Retention

By taking into account different categories of factors, literature (*e.g.*, Jassawalla et al., 2004; Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007; Martin & Anthony, 2006; Paik et al., 2002, Stroh et al, 1998) has revealed models that seek to understand the success of repatriation such as the retention of repatriates. Thereby several researchers focus on the relation between a Foreign assignment and reintegration and career development. Other research works have focused on the efficiency of repatriation through the repatriates' retention in their companies of origin as well understanding

the impact of personality traits as being an antecedent of repatriation retention. (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007; Martin & Anthony, 2006; Reiche, 2009; Harvey & Novicencic, 2006; Hyder & Lövblad, 2007).

Since the goal in this research is to identify the motivations behind the repatriate's decision not to leave the organization after repatriation, following chapter presents theories that explore the retention of repatriates accordingly. The subchapters are divided into individual and organizational factors, as literature has indicated that both aspects have a great impact on repatriate's retention. Firstly, individual characteristics such as uncertainty, adjustment, expectation, motivation and personality traits are stated. Secondly, organizational factors are being considered, including organizational support, job commitment, role clarity and repatriation programs. The author takes propositions to each factor.

2.3.1. Individual Factors

According to literature, individual factors are associated to the repatriate and to the impact of his/her personal characteristics and difficulties in the decision-making about leaving the home company after returning from an overseas assignment as well as to the repatriate's adjustment to the workplace and thereby encompassing different aspects of the expatriates' functions (Sánchez et al., 2007; Black & Gregersen, 1999).

Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall, and Valk (2010) argue that repatriation is a time of uncertainty for the repatriate. In the late 1970s the theory of uncertainty reduction (URT) has been introduced and with it the foundation of the repatriation model suggested by Black and Gregersen in the 1990s (Howe-Walsh, 2013). Reducing the level of uncertainty repatriates might face during repatriation is regarded as primary theoretical aspect (Black and Gregersen, 1991). During the overseas assignment, employees get in touch with new situations and different environments. In these settings, individuals often feel uncertain about what is an acceptable behaviour and what an unacceptable behaviour (Adler, 1981). Consequently, researchers have suggested that learning what is acceptable and how to act appropriately in the new environment is essential in order to reduce the level of uncertainty. While factors reducing feelings of uncertainty have a positive impact on the readjustment process during repatriation, factors increasing it can have negative impact and tend to impede the readjustment process (Gregersen and Stroh, 1997, pp. 635-654). *Proposition 1: Repatriates with less uncertainty upon return are more likely to stay with the company of origin.*

Although Lazarova and Cerdin (2007) claim the lack of clarification and empirical support that could provide information on the high failure rates of expatriation management, Black

(1994) has introduced relevant findings in which the clarification of repatriation process facilitates the repatriates' individual and social adjustment after returning from the international assignment. Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall and Stroh (1999) have introduced a theoretical model indicating three main adjustment elements that affect expatriates when adjusting to the host country. This line of inquiry has been extended and indicates that the model is applicable on repatriation adjustment too, by involving the same kind of related yet distinct dimensions as expatriation adjustment (Black, Mendenhall and Oddu, 1991, pp. 291-293). These are:

- Adjustment to work,
- Adjustment to the general living environment
- Adjustment to interact with home nationals

Researchers suggest that some of these factors have an impact on all elements of adjustment, while others only have an effect on single elements (Black, Mendenhall and Oddu, 1991, Black at al., 1992; Gregersen & Stroh, 1999, Feldman & Thompson, 1993; Sulaymonov, 2017). Consequently, it is argued, that the adjustment process is a multifaceted phenomenon (MacDonald and Arthur, 2003, pp. 4-5). *Proposition 2: Repatriates who adjust well to their home country are more likely to stay with their home company.*

Repatriates returning home, often create false assumptions regarding their adjustment such as settling into the community quickly and re-establish both business and social contacts. However, literature provides evidence that, many repatriates in fact face difficulties such as dealing with multiple adjustment issues what has been termed as reverse culture shock. Changes that occurred in the home country environment as well as in the organizations environment during their stay abroad, tend to be neglected by repatriates, which results in feeling frustrated because home coming did not work as they might have expected (Harzing & Ruysseveldt, 1995). Jassawalla et al., (2004) emphasized the repatriates' expectations as a prediction variable for satisfaction increase and their turnover reduction. This means that there is a positive reduction between the repatriates' expectations before leaving the country, together with the interpersonal relationships established with co-workers in the repatriation stage. These variables have been considered self-explanatory with reference to the decrease of uncertainty and anxiety feelings and to the repatriate's high sense of belonging to the home company (Peltonen, 1997; Suutari & Brewster, 2003).

Furthermore, researchers claim that individuals who accept an international placement often expect to be rewarded upon return such as thriving career advanced opportunities and to have the possibility to make use of their newly acquired skills (Peltonen, 1997; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Others, state that repatriates who's expectations had been met indicated to

adjust better and showed higher levels of commitment and job performance than those whose expectations were unmet (Stroh & Gregersen & Black 2000). Although the great majority of studies focusing on expectations related to foreign assignments, relies on dichotomous measures as met versus unmet expectations, several scholars have put attention on the importance of taking into account over met expectations as well. They suggest that over met interpersonal relationships at work result in repatriates showing higher commitment. In turn, unmet expectations regarding job constraints result in higher commitment than when expectations are met or over met. Thus, the content of an expectation influences its outcome (Hyder & Lövblad, 2007). Nonetheless, it is also suggested that repatriation expectations can further be divided into three categories: work, general and interaction expectations. Subsequently they have different antecedents and consequences. Especially inexperienced expatriates seem to show greater difficulties when forming realistic expectation that can be met by companies. The accuracy of expectations is thus to be regarded as an important element during the repatriation process. Reports state that it is the company's duty to help repatriates to form realistic expectations before and after their return (Suutari & Brewster, 2003; Kulkarni et al., 2010). *Proposition 3: Expectations can have a predictive character on repatriate's retention.*

Research provides evidence that different types of Foreign Service Employees (FSEs) have different motives for accepting an overseas assignment as well as perceived negative effects for refusing the foreign assignment and the expected rewards for successfully finalizing and the foreign placement. Consequently, the motivation factor has crucial significance on the psychological contract of a repatriate when he or she takes the decision to stay with the company of origin (Edström and Galbraith, 1977).

An empirical study conducted by Hyder and Lövblad (2007) explored that an expatriate's motivation to take over an international assignment is linked to the expectations a repatriate develops upon return. It is suggested that employees who have accepted and overseas assignment with the goal to improve future career possibilities and progress will expect a higher career outcome upon return, compared to expatriates that take up an assignment for enrichment purpose such having the opportunity to live in another country for a period of time (Edström and Galbraith, 1977; Hyder & Lövblad, 2007; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Another investigation demonstrates that differences between organizational motivation to send an employee abroad and an individual's motivation to accept an international assignment are distinct. Individuals tend to be motivated by thriving for career advancement, the perspective of obtaining good salary as well as going on an adventure. Companies on the other hand are motivated by the

transfer of knowledge and achievement of project objectives. Subsequently, scholars believe that repatriates motivations have to be aligned with organizational expectations in order to safeguard the retention of repatriation (Paik, 2002). *Proposition 4: A repatriate's motivation to accept an international assignment is related to his or her commitment with the company of origin.*

A repatriate's experience abroad is regarded to be another antecedent of a repatriate's decision to stay or leave the company after the completion of the assignment. Scholars have introduced the so called social exchange theory arguing that if an individual perceives the benefit of a relationship to outweigh any type of cost (cost-benefit analysis) than he or she is likely to be satisfied and will remain in a current position (Reiche, 2012). In this sense, if the repatriate has been satisfied with the international assignment and the relationships developed, her or she will be more committed to stay with the organization upon return, even though readjustment has not gone so well. In addition, it is stated that these repatriates are likely to take on a new assignment and form new relationships that will benefit the company (Reiche, 2012). *Proposition 5: Positive experiences abroad can have a positive impact on the decision to stay with the company when returning from the international assignment.*

The last factor, related to individual factors introduced by literature are the personality traits. O'Sullivan (2002) constructed a model of repatriate proactivity in which she states that there is one specific personality trait that is linked to repatriate attrition rates. According to her, proactive personality characterizes an individual that has a high level of extraversion, is safeguarded by emotional stability, has a certain level of openness, is viewed as being conscientiousness and tends to be agreeableness. A proactive personality drives proactive behaviour, which is the act of frequent social networking and being continuously interested as well as curious to seek information related to the job market (O'Sullivan, 2002; O'Sullivan 2013). These individuals are more likely to play with the intention to leave the company. This model is being supported by other scholars who state proactive repatriates to be more likely to establish large networks seek information in regard of alternatives to their current position and company. This relates to the intention to accept an offer from the competitor and consequently to leave the home company after repatriation (O'Sullivan, 2002; O'Sullivan 2013). *Proposition 6: Proactive personality traits of repatriates are predictors for repatriate turnover.*

2.3.2. Organizational variables

Organizational factors are considered as the way an organization provides support to an individual throughout the whole expatriation/ repatriation cycle. Within these categories all

policies related to organizational practices to support repatriation are included (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Reiche, 2009).

Research has validated empirical evidence that organizations are far more effective in providing supporting programs to expatriates taking up an international placement than they are in providing a solid repatriation program for repatriates (Feldman, 1991, Harvey, 1983). As a result, effective utilization of repatriates cannot be guaranteed and the employee's hesitancy to accept an international assignment in the future might be lower than before (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Adler 1981). Studies indicate that 70 % of organizations provide cross-cultural preparation programs to expatriates before moving to the host country. In contrast, only 15% of companies provide repatriates re-entry training or program to support them during re-adjustment to their home country (Black & Gregersen, 1999). A study conducted in the 1990s, estimated that 90% of enterprises offer less than three hours of training to repatriates, already suggesting that companies have yet to understand the significance of effective repatriation practice (Engen, 1995). Home companies often find it inconceivable that repatriates face difficulties to readjust back to their home country. Martin and Anthony (2006) suggested that the organizations that develop and apply formal repatriation programs indicate the best repatriate retention rates. Moreover, the researchers point out that formal repatriation programs should start their implementation before the foreign assignment takes place and they should be kept during post expatriation stage. Moreover, researchers argue that a supportive HR department during the whole IA life cycle has a positive impact on repatriate retention, since it is supposed to help returning employees to deal with the repatriation process as well as increasing job motivation (Furuya et al., 2009, Kraimer et al., 2009 & Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Literature further highlights that HRM policies and practices have an effect on the emotional commitment within organizations, as well as on the repatriate's satisfaction with respect to repatriation policies and programs (Paik et al., 2002). *Proposition 7: Companies that implement repatriation programs can increase the retention of repatriates.*

Job factors have been extensively investigated in expatriate literature as they demonstrate to have a strong effect on expatriation outcome. However, in repatriation literature, job factors are poorly investigated. Only one study conducted by Gregersen (1992) discovered that role clarity and role discretion have a positive effect on the repatriate's satisfaction level with his new job. In literature the term role is defined as an expected behaviour associated with a particular job position in a group or even organization. Evidence is given that a repatriate's tasks in the foreign subsidiary often differ from the once in the company of origin. It has been highlighted that repatriates encounter a great amount of independency and responsibility while

being abroad. However, upon return this cannot always be guaranteed. Thus, literature has emphasised the organizational need to offer role clarity and decision making in an early stage of the assignment, which means before the assignment has been completed since it can have a significant impact on the work adjustment of the repatriate (Suutari & Välimaa, 2002). *Proposition 8: Role clarity from an early stage can have a positive impact on the decision of a repatriate to stay with the company.*

Lack of career opportunities are referred to organizational antecedents of repatriation turnover. Studies indicate that repatriate's intent to leave the current firm is not necessarily due to the fact that they are dissatisfied with their job itself but rather because they perceive the career advancement opportunities as being limited (Baruch, Steele & Quantrill, 2002; Feldman & Thompson, 1993; Forster, 1997, Pattie et al. 2010). Companies who do not provide their returning expatriates with career opportunities and a long-term career planning basis take the risk that repatriates are exposed to experience career anxiety. As a consequence, repatriates also look into the external job market where they find more favourable career opportunities and often these are with the direct competitor. Repatriation literature emphasizes that organizations fail to integrate foreign assignments with long-term career planning (O'Sullivan, 2002; O'Sullivan, 2013).

Moreover, it is claimed that a secure position after return to the home company has not been guaranteed at the beginning of the assignment. Consequently, repatriates might feel insecure that the time they have spent abroad has decreased their status at work (Dowling and Welch, 2004). Consequently, theorists claim that repatriates are like active hunters which seek out the best available opportunities for career advancement, either within or across other companies (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005). *Proposition 9: Long-term career planning and advancement opportunities are predictors of repatriation retention.*

To Sánchez et al. (2007) the influence of organizational factors is greater, when the time of the international assignment is longer especially when organizations tend to segregate domestic and foreign subsidiaries into separate businesses resulting in studying the overseas operations as secondary to the domestic headquarter (Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Black and Gregersen, 1991). As a result, repatriates are not in regular contact with their home national colleagues and are more likely to be confronted with the "out of sight" syndrome. This phenomenon refers to the loss of relationship between the expatriate and the company of origin and can negatively impact the commitment of the repatriate to the company (Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Black and Gregersen, 1991). *Proposition 10: Regular contact with the home company during expatriation is a predictor of repatriation retention.*

According to scholars transfer of knowledge during repatriation is regarded to be another essential factor when it comes to repatriate retention. Mäkelä & Brewster (2009) argue that there are five factors that affect the knowledge transfer during repatriation. 1. Collaborative management style (group motivation to receive knowledge), 2. A leader's global mind-set, 3. Group orientation towards learning, 4. The groups absorptive capacity (ability to receive knowledge) and 5. Perceived knowledge critically. Empirical evidence is provided that a repatriate's interaction is related to knowledge transfer via interpersonal trust and shared cognitive ground (Oddou, Osland & Blakeney, 2009). Milliken and Martins (1996) further argue that a heterogeneous group composition is a major antecedent of organizational outcome. Members of groups with a heterogeneous environment, will experience less positive social interactions and are significantly less satisfied with their colleagues and consequently are likely to not enjoy the team experience and report more conflicts (Harrison et al., 2002; Riordan & Shore, 1997). As a result, the value of the group membership decreases rapidly and one's sense of belonging may be adversely affected, which means that identification with team is less likely. This in turn can have a negative effect on the repatriate's job satisfaction. Job satisfaction in turn can be linked to a repatriate's decision making process of staying with the company or not (Milliken & Martins, 1996). On the other hand, studies show that positive interpersonal relationships with co-workers can provide a sense of connection and order. Social support and the quality of relationships at work have been identified to facilitate the adjustment process of repatriates as well as being a factor that reduces the uncertainty associated with interacting (Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley, 1999; Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008; Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). *Proposition 11: Knowledge transfer as well as group composition can impact the decision making process on deciding to leave or stay with the home country organization.*

3. Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research method that has been followed for this study. This includes: (1) research design, (2) sample description, (3) data collection, (4) interview structure and (5) content analysis. The aim of this thesis was to give a voice to repatriates as identified in the literature review. Based on my research questions and goals identified in Chapter 1, a qualitative research methodology was appropriate as it allowed to investigate the motivations of repatriates to stay with the company after returning from their international assignment. By collecting data and exploring the phenomenon of repatriation an inductive approach has been used (Saunders, et al., 2016 p.145).

3.1. Research Design

Qualitative research is designed to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people, to explore the human elements of the topic (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999, p. 216; Given, 2008, p. 2). It further allows the researcher to examine the complexity of an issue in a deeper context. By making sense of the subject and socially construct meanings expressed about the phenomenon which is being studied, qualitative research is often associated with being an interpretive philosophy (Saunders et al., 2016). Using a qualitative attempt in this thesis was an obvious choice since few amount of prior knowledge and information about repatriation retention was available as well as the fact that it accepts contradictions, alternative explanations and ambiguity resulting from differences in participant's experiences (Mack et al., 2005, pp. 1-3). Among the different methods for qualitative research, interviewing is the most common which has also been chosen for this research purpose (Chew-Graham, May & Perry, 2002, p. 285).

3.2. Sample description

Generally speaking, there are two types of sampling techniques, probability and non-probability sampling (Saunders et al., 2016 p. 276). Due to limited time, budget and logistics constraints, as well as this study being a qualitative one, the author of this paper has chosen the non - probability sampling technique which is also called convenience sampling approach. This sampling type includes an element of subjective judgment while selecting subjects according to their accessibility, preferably most conveniently (Saunders et al., 2016 pp. 295-297). Thus, a purposive sampling technique, based on using own judgment to select the subjects that are most likely to answer the research question, has been decided on for this thesis. Accordingly, it allows the selection of a small sample size purposively to meet the objective of gathering detailed and information-rich data (Saunders et al., 2003, pp. 170-172).

In this sense, the sample to gather primary information included repatriated expatriates (repatriates) who continue to work for the company as they have been working for before the international assignment. The author made use of the snowball sampling strategy. This means that the interview candidates were asked to name other expatriates who successfully completed the international assignment and continue to work in the home country company, mostly colleagues (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 303). The sample includes 8 repatriates which have taken up to 3 different international assignments. The most recent return was 1 ½ years ago and the latest 7 years ago. The location of the foreign assignment varied from North and South America to Europe and South East Asia. Especially beneficial for the comprehensiveness and

representativeness of the data are the diverse backgrounds of candidates.

3.3. Data collection

In this thesis the researcher decided to perform data collection through the use of research interviews. According to literature “the research interview is a purposeful conversation between two or more people, requiring the interviewer to establish rapport and ask concise and unambiguous questions, to which the interviewee is willing to respond, and to listen attentively” (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 388). Depending on the study purpose, the interview type varies. In qualitative research non-standardised interviews are the most common practice to collect data. Due to the fact, that this study has an exploratory research purpose, the author decided to use semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 391). Semi structured interviews give the interview candidates the opportunity to use their own words and ideas to describe their experiences. With standardised questionnaires, this would not be able, since participants would have to select their answer from given responses. Making use of semi-structured interviews instead of questionnaires, allowed the researcher to understand the meaning of the answers given, which can add great significance to the data obtained. Additionally, new findings of which the researcher might not have thought of before can arise from the flow of conversation (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 394). Talking about sensitive topics such as personal experiences including fears and motivations, would be more difficult to explore in a questionnaire as candidates might not be able to express their feelings in much detail.

However, with semi-structured interviews, the researcher can establish trust with the interviewee, which can bring him or her to mention aspects that are personally meaningful (Mack et al., 2005, p. 4). As a result, interviews guarantee a higher response rate as well as greater control over the answers. Consequently, this affects the reliability of the data received from the interviews, relative to questionnaires (Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 394-395). As qualitative data is rather unstructured, the collection as well as interpretation is a time-consuming process. In this sense, the amount of findings is depended on the given sources and available time frame. Criticism in regard to primary qualitative research such as data quality or credibility issues are common and thus important to be mentioned. As semi-structured interviews are rather non standardized concerns in regard to reliability is given. In general, there are three main biases. Participation bias, interview response bias and the interviewer bias. The first bias usually emerges from the candidate’s willingness to participate in the interview. The length of the interview can have a significant impact on the motivation and endurance of the potential participant.

The second bias, the interview response bias, is dependent on the candidate's perception of the researcher. Researcher presence can have an impact on the interviewee's range of responses. As sensitive and personal topics are addressed, the interviewee can perceive some questions as invasion into his or her personal life. The fact of recording the interview or being face to face with the interviewer, can be another inhibition for the participant to provide truthful responses. As a result, collected data has to be considered as less representative as they are not standardised and highly specific to the participant's perception and perspective.

Non-verbal behaviour, comments or tones of the interviewer are the main cause for the last bias. Objectivity is almost impossible to ensure as the method of the interviewer to interpret the answers of the candidate can differ to the actual responses given. As a consequence, findings tend to illustrate a personal creation by being impacted through the understanding, belief, perception and background knowledge of the researcher (Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 396-397). Lastly, the interviewer's communication skills can have an influence on the quality of the answers provided by the interview candidate and as a result affect the research outcome and success level. Consciousness when forming assumptions or generalizing the collected data to other subjects beyond the relatively small sample size interviewed is thus of utmost importance (Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 398-400).

3.4. Interview structure

As mentioned before the primary data was collected through interviews. None of the interviews could be conducted face-to-face, due to the current pandemic COVID-19 and thus all 8 interviews have been conducted via online video-call. All 8 interview have been conducted in English language in order to facilitate the analysis process of this thesis. Interview candidates provided permission to capture the data by recording the interview. This in turn helped the researcher to ensure an authentic and complete record of the topics being discussed. All interviews have been conducted during May and June 2020. Table 3.1 illustrates the demographics of each Interview candidate (IC). Characteristics have been divided into gender, age, total years abroad, number of assignments, country of assignment, most recent return, home country, working industry, family accompaniment, seniority.

Table 3.1: Sample characteristics

IC	Gender	Age	Years abroad	Nr. of assignments	Country	Most recent return	Home county	Working industry	Family accompanied	Seniority
A	M	53	5	2	CH, CN	2019	DE	Chemical	yes	24
B	F	45	3	1	BR	2017	DE	Chemical	Partially yes	16
C	M	61	11	3	ES, CN	2019	DE	Automotive	yes	35
D	M	56	2	1	CN	2013	DE	Steel & machinery	yes	30
E	M	40	5	1	CN	2016	DE	Chemical	Partially yes	15
F	M	56	3	1	US	2016	DE	Software/IT	yes	10
G	M	52	3	1	CN	2014	DE	Chemical	yes	20
H	M	56	8	3	PT, BR, CN	2014	DE	Chemical	yes	36

Source: Own illustration

The interview guideline consisted of 7 areas of discussion. At first, the IC was welcomed and thanked for participating in this study and the objective of the research has been introduced. Secondly, the interviewer asked the IC to introduce himself while focusing on his assignment life cycle. The third part consists of the main focus areas and covered questions related to the repatriate's motivation to go abroad, his or her expectation upon return, the process of readjusting back to the home country and company. In addition, the interviewee was asked to think and to share in what extent he or she received support from the company side upon return and in how far all the factors influenced his or her decision to stay with the home country company upon return as well as to describe his or her willingness to go an another international assignment in the future. If the answers of the candidate have been too broad, the researcher made an effort to ask more specific and in more detail. The interview was closed, after the interviewer discussed all relevant topics.

Due to the fact that qualitative data sets contain complex and very large content, the management of the findings is highly important. To do so the author of this thesis decided to transcribe the raw data and later categorize them according to meanings. This process is

typically called coding (Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 572-573). Data has been reproduced verbatim as word processed account, by neglecting laughter and other kind or interruptions as they are irrelevant for the analysis. The audio-recordings lasted from 35 minutes to 65 minutes. The difference in the length of the interviews can be explained by the variations in the communication style, personal experience of candidates, including the number of assignments, and their openness.

3.5. Content Analysis

Since this is a qualitative study and data has been collected through interviews, reliability and validity have to be redefined to reflect the ways of establishing truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 1400). As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 328), the concept of trustworthiness has been redefined and replaced by reliability and validity with the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 398). Credibility can be addressed through a number of techniques, such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, data collection triangulation, researcher triangulation, as well as peer debriefing (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 396). To prove transferability, it is recommended to provide thick descriptions to allow readers to judge transferability. To achieve dependability, the research process has to be logical, traceable, and clearly documented. As a consequence, confirmability is established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are accomplished. The aim is to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been achieved (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 1380). In this thesis the researcher chose to outline the procedure for conducting thematic analysis that aims to produce trustworthy and insightful findings through the criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Berelson (1952) stated that: “Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”. Thus, the researcher of this thesis used the inductive thematic approach with the purpose to search for themes, that occur across the data set for further analysis (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016, p. 579). First open codings of transcripts have been done. This means that each interview had been read multiple times in order to find potential important content and to draw meaning out of the interviews. This process is called coding and is one of the most important methods (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 578). With the coding process, data can be analyzed thematically in much detail. The result of categorizing data with similar meaning to specific and particular categories, leads to the identification of rich descriptions and explanations (Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 579-580). The main objective is to transform the collected data into units and provide

them with labels (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The resulting text sections with code labels are essential for the comparison process and help to order the related groupings or categories. It helps to develop and identify analytical concepts and categories in the end (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The researcher was able to detect various topics that repatriates have shared with the researcher. Thus, the researcher could and identify several codes. The below shown codes in Table 3.2 are an extract of all the classified codes. The complete bank of codes can be found in Appendix B. The transcripts of each interview can be found in Appendix C.

Table 3.2: Table of Codes

Theme	Category	Code	Quote
Individual characteristics	Expectations	Job role	“So there was a clear expectation from my end about that I will be offered a role, which is considering the amount of learning, the amount of expectation of knowledge that I gained, especially in the context of international business, which is always a very sensitive piece of the cake in mid-sized German companies.” (IC F)
	Motivation to accept an international assignment	Personal Interest	“To be honest, my motivation was in both cases, not the step after, so coming back and then say, okay, now I want to make career, now I want to have at least the next level or something like this. This was for sure not my intention (...) so for me my motivation was always to have the chance to work or to live in a different cultural background, do this kind of adventure and getting new experiences” (IC A); “so any opportunity going abroad, we would

			take just also for the sake of the kids, because I think it's the best thing you can do for your kids to be really metropolitan and having a different mind-set (IC B)
	Personal attitudes	Extravert personality	“I've started to kind of to bring myself back into their minds. So be more present again in Germany. So I took a chance during business trips in Germany in order to meet with different senior manager in different function in order to introduce myself and to address my interests and that I would like to go back” (IC E)
Organizational aspects	Company characteristics and opportunities	Company strategy of belonging	“I was part of the team. That's the important thing. I felt that what we are doing outside was really an important part of the puzzle. And indeed it was (...). I felt I was part of the team. Part of the strategy. So I felt very well or comfortable, and that's why I didn't look to others.” (IC C)
	Company support	Job position	“For me, the most important thing is really to feel supported when coming back by the management that you have the feeling somebody really is supporting you to find a new position” (IC A)

	Communication and contact	Human Resources Department	<p>“Regular meetings from the home country with a dedicated HR person. Regular calls every quarter, every half a year, meeting together with the HR home manager and the related expatriates in order to discuss certain aspects what could happen (...) especially focusing on those things such as repatriation in order to start the discussion provide the feeling that somebody is taking care of you during the expatriation time itself” IC E); “In XY its usually that you always have contact with your home, with your headquarter. The opportunity to talk also to the human resources department for further reasons because you have to find new staff for your rising company. So you're in constant contact also with the Department of Human Resources. So that's a big advantage” (IC C)</p>
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Source: Own illustration

After assigning the codes to the text sections of the interviews, the next step was to compare the codes and group them accordingly. Similar codes were grouped into a superordinate category. In order to create a short list of analytic categories, the author of this thesis always referred back to the research question, research aim and research objectives (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 584). To evaluate whether these analytic categories are meaningful to one another and are part of a coherent set, the researcher had to redefine themes (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 585). This meant that the author bundled the categories into the main themes tested propositions in order to formulate conclusions (Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 585-586) The analytic categories included (1) Expectations upon return (2) Motivation to accept an international assignment (3) Personal attitudes (4) Company characteristics and opportunities (5) Company support (6)

Communication and Contact. As a result, the author of this research paper decided that these are the main research findings and are presented in the next chapter.

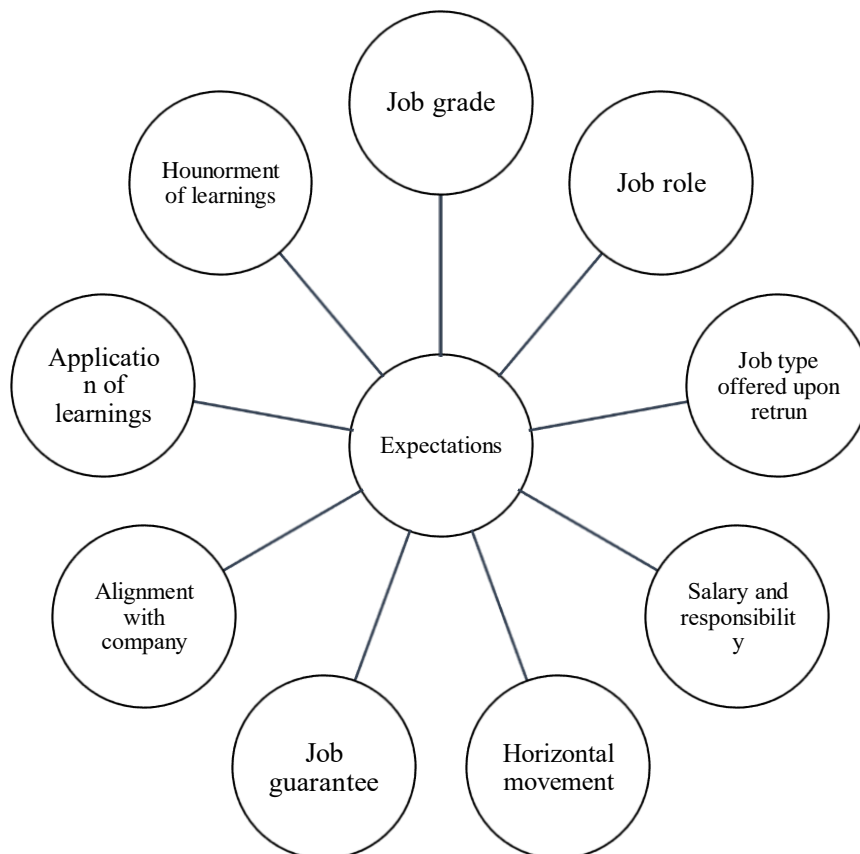
4. Findings

In this chapter, the outcomes of the primary research concerning the research gap and the research questions identified in Chapter 1 are presented. For a clear and enhanced understanding of the topic of this research paper, the findings of the interviews are organized in 6 subsections each corresponding to one identified theme.

4.1. Expectations upon return

Although expectations have been diverse among the interview candidates, it can be said that all expectations have been related to work. The researcher grouped these job expectations in following 9 codes and labelled them as following:

Figure 4.1: Repatriates expectations



Source: Own illustration

Interview candidate G, who lived 3 years in China with his family indicated that upon his return he expected to receive a position that is at least at the same job level as before. He claimed *“I would have a certain expectation to the job grade. I would not do a job that would be below my previous one. (...) But yet, to find something on a comparable base/level. I think that was my expectation”* (Interview G, 2020). The role which the repatriate would take upon his return has been another crucial aspect for some interview candidates. Candidate F for instance, went to live in the United States for 3 years as he wanted to increase his international work experience and thus self-initiated the international assignment opportunity. Going abroad with the mission to broaden his international mind-set, gain new business insights and increase his level of knowledge, he expected a job role that would recognise his learnings. Interview participant F argued *“So there was a clear expectation from my end about that I will be offered a role, which is considering the amount of learning, the amount of expectation of knowledge that I gained, especially in the context of international business, which is always a very sensitive piece of the cake in mid-sized German companies”* (Interview F, 2020).

Interviewee H, who has been on 3 different assignments claimed that after his first intentional stay abroad in Portugal, which has been in his early career stage, he did not play with the thought to leave the company as the job type offered upon return met his expectation in regard to being able to make the next step in his career. He affirmed: *“I got an interesting job offer in the headquarters in Germany, which allowed me to further grow and further gain experience. So therefore, I honestly did not have really thought to leave the company”* (Interview H, 2020). However, on his last assignment which has been in China, Interviewee H had a different expectation upon his return. For him it was highly important to go back to his home country after the planned three years of the assignment because he wanted to make sure that his daughter has the possibility to start her university career in Germany. As a result, his job related expectation differed. In comparison to his expectation after his first assignment he claimed that this time, the salary and responsibility on the job back in the home company was more significant than a job where he can further grow or gain experience. Participant H said *“So the expectations I had were a job on a certain salary level, that was point number one, second thing to have responsibility also for personnel also having responsibility for a bigger business, ideally having direct reporting line to the business unit head”* (Interview H, 2020).

Four interview candidates (A, C, D and G) supported the fact that repatriates cannot expect to receive an immediate upgrade on their job grade after returning from their international placement. It is to be mentioned that all four candidates have a relatively high level of seniority with an average of 25 years with the company. This seniority indicates, that their position in

the company is already relatively high and therefore all of them agreed that going abroad will not provide them with a guarantee to get even higher in the career ladder. Instead horizontal movement is what should be expected. Interviewee G pointed out *“I think you cannot always expect that's going up and up, even if you are high in the organisation. It is even harder and harder to get higher every time”* (Interview G, 2020).

Moreover, the researcher identified that the level of expectation in regard to a job guarantee upon return proved to be another indicator. IC E explained that *“I have to say that my expectation was pretty low right from the beginning because I've heard it already and I've started to get some exchange with colleagues in order to get a little bit of understanding about how it works. And one thing I've heard right from the beginning was that repatriation means not that you have directly a job guarantee (...)”* (Interview E, 2020). This interview candidate returned from China after 5 years with a new born child and indicated that he had to put a lot of effort and take own initiatives at an early stage in order to clarify his job situation in the company of origin. To do so he regularly exchanged with colleagues what have been their experiences upon their return to the home company. This allowed him to manage his expectations and be aware of possible complications that can rise during repatriation.

Additionally, candidate C, who has the highest seniority level and the longest time living abroad (11 years) with several assignments, of all interviewed candidates, argued that it is highly important that personal expectations are aligned with company expectations. *“It's a development for you on the one hand, on the other end of course to fill out the needs of the company, it is kind of a trunk contract. So both sides are aware about what is the expectation”* (Interview C, 2020). Finally, having the opportunity to apply learnings and knowledge gained abroad has also been an important expectation from candidate A, F, and B. IC F said *“I was expecting to have my learnings, my achievements, my development, being honoured in a new position”* (Interview F, 2020). Thereby he pointed out that he expected to be honoured for his achievements as well and added: *“It is the only reason for staying. Absolutely. So you go out, you learn something. You perform. And then you want to apply whatever you learned there to your new job. And if that can be the case, if they allow you to do so, in my case, do exactly that on a broad scale, that is perfect. I mean, there is no there is no better way”*.

4.2. Motivation to accept an international assignment

The motivation to take over a foreign placement has been very similar among the individuals interviewed. The findings of this study reveal that there are 4 main types of motivational factors.

- 1) Personal Interest
- 2) Career interest
- 3) Personal and career interest combined
- 4) Company

driven forces. Results show that IC A as well as B's and F's motivation to go abroad has been driven by personal interest to live in a different cultural setting and to experience something new during a certain period of time. Interview candidate A stated *"To be honest, my motivation was in both cases, not the step after, so coming back and then say, okay, now I want to make career, now I want to have at least the next level or something like this. This was for sure not my intention (...) so for me my motivation was always to have the chance to work or to live in a different cultural background, do this kind of adventure and getting new experiences"* (Interview A, 2020). Although Interview Candidate A has been on 2 international assignments, he claimed that both times have been motivated by his curiosity to live in a different cultural setting and being able to share this experience with his family. In addition, it can be revealed that asking candidates about their motivation to accept an international assignment in the future, IC B for instance is motivated by personal reasons again. She claimed *"so any opportunity going abroad, we would take just also for the sake of the kids, because I think it's the best thing you can do for your kids to be really metropolitan and having a different mind-set"* (Interview B, 2020).

On the other hand, candidate C has been driven more intensively by future career seeking opportunities and prospects, especially when identifying his motivation in regard to his first international assignment which took place in his earlier career stage. He claims, *"well, at least it was one important step of my career, in XY there is a certain philosophy which at all times is of great importance (...) to grow to make your career to complete knowledge in different areas"* (Interview C, 2020). If he would not have accepted his first overseas assignment to Spain, he claimed he would probably not be where he is now. Being Chief Technology Officer of the company, has surely been influenced by his willingness to live abroad 11 years of his life for career reasons.

Moreover, some interview candidates pointed out that their motivation to go abroad has been a combination of personal and professional interest. IC D argued that *"it was kind of a mixture. So it was part of my career plan to go abroad (...) then there was also a private motivation to go abroad. Kind of an adventure seeking, indeed. So trying to do something differently and also to join that specific part of the life with the family abroad. That was also something. So not only my personal thing, but also for the family to get a development thing for the family"* (Interview C, 2020). Individual G introduces a different kind of motivation, which has been impacted by a restructure movement introduced by the company which eventually made him accept the international assignment. *"I wouldn't say we had no chance. But we were transferring an entire business or the global headquarters from the company, from Germany*

to Shanghai. And of course, with that, all the top managers, more or less were, I wouldn't say were forced, that's the wrong word because you can't force somebody. But it was somehow expected that you go with a business, especially in my case, as I was project lead for the headquarter relocation, it was pretty clear that I go with the business” (Interview G, 2020).

4.3. Personal attitudes

Besides, the importance of looking into the motivation to go abroad, interview candidates introduce the aspect of individual actions, desires and traits as being of another great relevance since these impacted their level of satisfaction. Interview candidate E claims *“I've started to kind of to bring myself back into their minds. So be more present again in Germany. So I took a chance during business trips in Germany in order to meet with different senior manager in different function in order to introduce myself and to address my interests and that I would like to go back”* (Interview E, 2020). This candidate showed that his extravert personality and his effort to maintain relationship with the home company has been an impacting factor on his decision to stay with the company of origin upon return. Apart from candidate E, Interviewee B said that her seniority level has impacted her decision to stay committed as well. She claims: *“I have been working with XY company already for more than 20 years. And actually, this is also one of the reasons why I'm still with the company”* (Interview B, 2020).

4.4. Company characteristics and opportunities

Interview candidates made clear that what makes them more committed to the company are certain characteristics a company has as well as the opportunities it offers to repatriates when they return to their home company. ICs indicated that transparency in the whole expatriation process as well as providing repatriates with feeling of belonging or being needed and treating them fairly in comparison to peer colleagues are among the most important motivational factors. Participant A emphasised: *“I think to avoid a kind of frustration upon return, it must be pretty transparent”* (Interview A, 2020). He explained that the whole assignment process should be discussed in detail with the assignee before he goes abroad in order to manage on one side his or her expectations but also to ensure that the expatriate is aware of each decision he is taking in regard to his long term career planning. Candidate C shares the importance of transparency and underlines: *“I was part of the team. That's the important thing. I felt that what we are doing outside was really an important part of the puzzle. And indeed it was (...). I felt I was part of the team. Part of the strategy. So I felt very well or comfortable, and that's why I*

didn't look to others." (Interview C, 2020). Ensuring that the repatriate feels part of the company's community and strategy while he is abroad, is an indicator on how satisfied he will be upon his return. The interview candidate has been abroad for 11 years which indicates that being part of the team although spending such a long time abroad is regarded as an impacting aspect. Being able to return to the headquarter without losing the connection and relationship between his direct colleagues and superiors helped him to feel welcome upon return which resulted in being committed to the home country organization. Moreover, Interviewee E highlighted the importance of appreciation. He stated: "*Nobody would leave the company if they really feel there are needed*" (Interview E, 2020). Candidate E, F and B agreed that if there is sufficient appreciation from the company side, there will be no reason to leave the company. Interviewee F agreed by saying: "*On management level there was enough appreciation*" (Interview F, 2020). Candidates who supported that feeling needed from the company side is an influencing factor further claimed that organizations who want to provide this feeling to their employees do best if they communicate with the returning repatriate in order to figure out what his or her needs and objectives are when working again in the home country base.

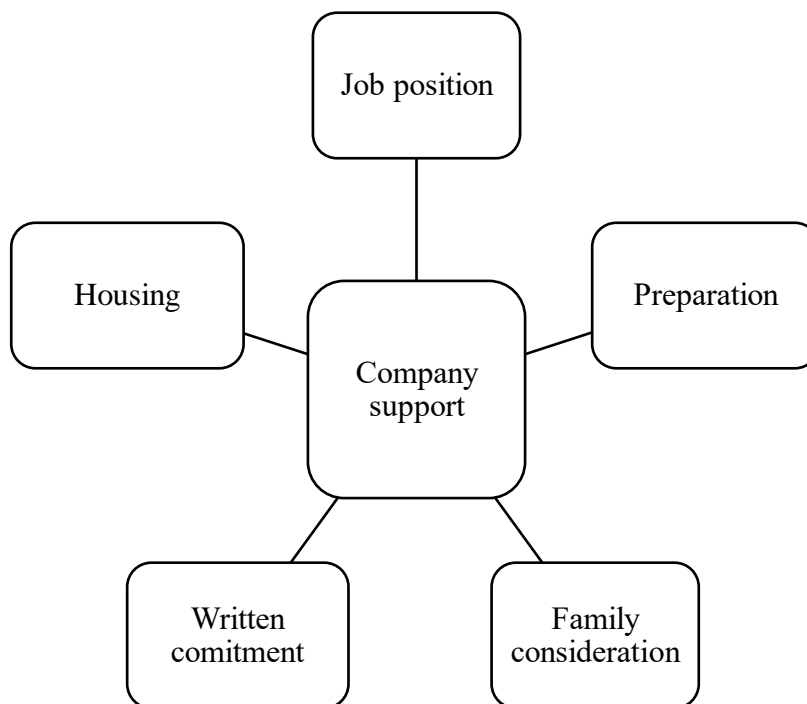
Moreover, it was pointed out that fairness is a crucial motivator which a company should not neglect. "*It is really the appreciation of the company, that people who show flexibility going abroad, are sometimes not valued, especially not valued on a similar level as people that just stay at home*" (Interview E, 2020). Fairness among employees who stayed in the home company and the ones who went on an international assignment should be given at all times. It was argued that people who did not go abroad sometimes have been treated more fairly, in terms of career progress and support or simply giving them priority in finding a physical place in the office. In this sense, Interviewee E pointed out that upon his return he would have wished a bit more equality and fairness from the home company, as he experienced sometimes and unfair treatment.

Lastly, findings reveal that the frame of opportunities being offered by the company is another factor that influences a repatriate's decision to stay with the company. Interviewee B specified: "*And that's why I appreciate to work for a big group and maybe one day we have a chance again to go abroad so now it's less about me, I have to say but rather also about what is the overall circumstance to work for the family as well. And then I think it's quite cool.*" (Interview B, 2020). Candidate B who took an IA to Brazil, returned to her home base with two kids. Her experience abroad was so positive that will be highly interested to go abroad again. As the company she works for is large and offers many different opportunities to its employees, she decided to stay with the company as she looks forward to going abroad again.

4.5. Company support

In comparison to the support provided by companies when the expatriate accepts the international assignment, the support measures used during repatriation vary considerably. May it be large multinational companies or small-medium sized local companies, all of them pay less attention on return mechanisms and programs that help repatriates to integrate, adjust and feel satisfied with their return. Consequently, all interview candidates agreed that a certain support needs to be given from the company side during repatriation and especially due to the fact that repatriation is often overlooked. Interviewees introduced some supportive indicators that should be provided by the company which are illustrated in Figure 4.2:

Figure 4.2: Supportive indicators of Company support



Source: Own illustration

It was claimed that support should occur in different areas and depending on the need of the repatriate it should be accordingly adapted. For candidate A, who has lived in Switzerland and Hong Kong, being supported to find an accurate job position upon return was crucial at

both returns. In regard to his job position, participant of interview A said *“For me, the most important thing is really to feel supported when coming back by the management that you have the feeling somebody really is supporting you to find a new position”* (Interview A, 2020).

Apart from supporting the repatriates to find a secure position upon return, another candidate highlighted that the preparation itself is of great importance too. Interviewee E and others emphasized that the company is responsible of preparing the repatriate with the possibility of not having the desired job position upon return directly. Interview partner E stated *“All repatriates need to be prepared from the expectation point of view right from the beginning in order to say, well, you are going abroad on a concrete position, that is something which is now. Once you will go back, there is not a position for you automatically available. There is starting a kind of interview application process for the position, and that is something which you need to be aware of. I think that is a very important element because than people can manage that kind of expectation right from the beginning and it's part of the deal to go as an expatriate”* (Interview E, 2020).

Family and/or spouse support is another aspect. Interviewee E, G, A and B highlighted that the family is an additional consideration which needs to be respected by the company. Candidate B claimed *“But the employer should really consider the overall family situation of someone as well. And especially if they do not have to offer you a proper job, an interesting job”*, as she had to return with two kids, one of them newly born which means that her life back in the home country would not be the same as it has been before the overseas assignment (Interview B, 2020). Providing support in finding a kindergarden place is an effective support measure. The company can act as an intermediary when repatriates have to prepare administrative work upon return in regard to finding a school or kindergarden place. These have been examples provided by interviewees in which the company should provide helping mechanisms that are being welcomed by repatriates who return with their family.

Furthermore, IC E stressed: *“HR should have on their checklist, not only the person in the company that goes abroad and repatriated as well but the entire family does and perhaps take something into account that there is a feeling of careness, which means not that the company needs to find a job for the spouse or whatever to spend more money. It's really, I would say, appreciation and the kind of careness for the people related to it”* (Interview E, 2020). Candidate E highlighted that the way of providing support to the family should not be introduced by monetary incentives but rather taking into account the more emotional part. This is to say that receiving regular phone calls from the HR department in order to verify with the repatriate if the spouse is doing fine, if there is any matter where the company can support, is

more valuable and effective as it calms down the repatriate and gives him a feeling of overall caring support.

It has further been deeply respected by two expatriate to receive a written commitment by the company which included the compromise that upon their return the company would ensure a job position for them. Both expatriates faced the situation that the headquarter (HQ) of their company has been moved abroad. In this sense, the old structure would not be available in their home company anymore. Interviewee F said *“And there I mean, that is maybe one additional thing the company provided, that was helpful, at the very end for most of the people, a clear commitment that they would take care once you go back that you will find a decent job. Of course, there was no guarantee for a certain job. There was no guarantee for a higher job grade or higher salary. It was more the commitment for fair treatment. We find something. Don't worry if you go, we will honour that”* (Interview F, 2020). A commitment letter increased the feeling of security and being respected by the company for the effort of the employee to go abroad for some years.

Three interviewees (H, G and A) also claimed that the company encouraged and supported them to keep their house in home country by offering them an additional monetary funding. Interviewee H pointed out that *“Yes, definitely. Having the house makes it much easier I would not say an entire prerequisite, but makes coming back and getting familiarized with your old life much more easy”*. (Interviewee G, 2020). Especially for repatriates who go abroad with their family, having a secure return place which on top is their familiar surrounding helps repatriates to adjust more rapidly upon return. Consequently, it decreases the adjustment stress during repatriation which can have a positive impact on the motivation to stay with the company of origin.

4.6. Communication and Contact

The last theme of findings is considered to be the communication between the expatriate and the home company as well as the regularity of contact between them. Five out of 8 ICs supported the fact that maintaining the relationship with colleagues in the home country is crucial to readjust back in the home company and eventually has a positive effect on their motivation to stay with the company. Interviewee C stressed that communication is the key to maintain a good relationship with the home company while the expatriate is abroad. *“The bond is created in communication. So communication and an interchange of a dialogue about your work. About how far you have gone with your project. Is everything running well? There has to be communication”*, says IC C and further added *“I've always had a lot of contact to my*

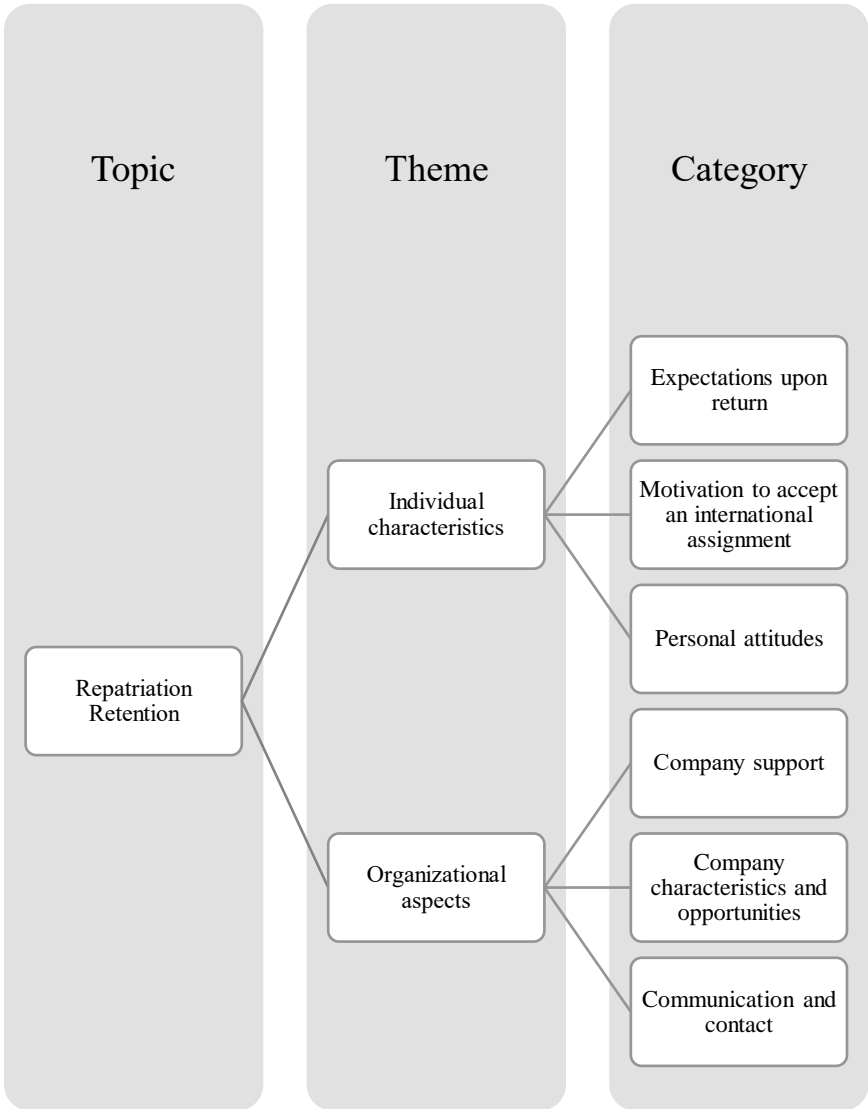
home base, to my bosses and also to my colleagues. So the bond did not crack down. I was abroad, but I always had communications and contact and discussions.” (Interview C, 2020). Moreover, it was emphasized that especially the relationship with the superior back in the home country needs to be maintained. Interview participant F stresses: *“I had a great personal relationship to my boss, which made me feel safe on my leave. And I was very positively thinking about my return. So I basically just put it into the back of my mind. I didn't really bother much”* (Interview F, 2020). Additionally, candidates' C and E pointed out that for them a regular contact with the home basis and in concrete with the Human Resources Department has been a great support. Interviewee E explained it as follows: *“Regular meetings from the home country with a dedicated HR person. Regular calls every quarter, every half a year, meeting together with the HR home manager and the related expatriates in order to discuss certain aspects what could happen (...) especially focusing on those things such as repatriation in order to start the discussion provide the feeling that somebody is taking care of you during the expatriation time itself”* (Interview E, 2020). Interviewee C further states: *“In XY its usually that you always have contact with your home, with your headquarter. The opportunity to talk also to the human resources department for further reasons because you have to find new staff for your rising company. So you're in constant contact also with the Department of Human Resources. So that's a big advantage”* (Interview C, 2020). Concluding, it should be highlight that by maintaining the contact and ensuring sufficient communication between home and host company can increase the quality of relationships and consequently can have a positive impact on a repatriate's motivation to stay with the home company.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, the author explores the findings by analysing them regarding the theoretical framework given in Chapter 2. Based on empirical data and the theoretical framework, a number of conclusions could be drawn. Factors provided in secondary data revealed that the motivation to stay with the home company is influenced by personal aspects and factors driven by the organization. To each factor, the author formulated propositions which in this chapter will be discussed in relation to the primary results provided of this study.

The research findings of this dissertation have been divided into two main themes. The two main themes entail 6 main categories (3 categories of each theme) which further are divided into various subcategories, also called codes. Figure 5.1 illustrates the topic, theme and main categories constellation in more detail.

Figure 5.1: Illustration of Finding Categories



Source: Own illustration

In this sense, personal aspects such as repatriate’s job related expectations upon their return, repatriate’s motivation to go abroad and personal attitudes as well as organizational aspects such as support provided by the company, organizational characteristics and the importance of regular communication between expatriates and the home organization will be discussed in this chapter.

Literature stated that repatriates form expectation on how they will readjust to their old living environment as well as to their home company. Especially to the career progression,

literature revealed that repatriates often tend to form expectations which can't be met. Unmet expatriation can lead to frustration among repatriates which affects their satisfaction level negatively (Suutari & Brewster, 2003; Kulkarni et al., 2010). For instance, a repatriate who expects to receive a higher salary and an upgrade in regard to his job position, and upon return the company is not able to meet these expectations he or she will feel frustrated and unsatisfied with the whole expatriation process. As a consequence, he or she might seek other job opportunities outside the company. On the other hand, if repatriate's expectations are aligned with what the company is able to offer to the repatriate, her or she will consider his expectations met and thus be satisfied with what he receives upon his return. Met expectations positively affect the decision of a repatriate to stay with the home company. The author of this thesis found out that met expectations can be:

- having a rewarding job upon return,
- receiving at least the same job grade as before,
- having their salary expectations met
- having aligned personal with company expectations
- being able to apply knowledge and learnings as well as
- feeling honoured by the company for the achievements made abroad

In this sense, *Proposition 3* “*Expectations can have a predictive character on repatriate's retention*” can be confirmed and should be viewed as central when considering focusing on how to manage repatriate's expectation in order to retain repatriates. Interview candidates further emphasized that it is the responsibility of the repatriate himself but also from the company to manage this expectation beforehand to avoid surprises upon return.

Moreover, literature showed that a repatriate's motivation to go abroad can be related to his or her expectation upon return. Secondary research indicated that repatriates who take over an IA for career reasons only, tend to have very elevated expectations regarding the job position they will encounter upon return or the level of responsibility of managing teams or the job grade he or she will obtain (Edström and Galbraith, 1977; Hyder & Lövblad, 2007; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). In contrast expatriates who go abroad with a perspective to gain cross cultural experiences and to seek adventure, will certainly differ in the range of expectations, especially when considering the ones, a company is not able to meet. In this sense, interview candidates highlighted the importance of not accepting an international assignment if the only reasons are career objectives. Repatriates highlighted that if this is the case and the individual returns at a point in time where the company is not able to offer the desired job role the individual will feel

frustrated and his satisfaction level will decrease, although the IA might have gone well. In contrast, interview participants whose motivations to go abroad included personal adventure seeking as well as future career opportunities, helped them to balance out their motivation in respect to their job related expectation. This had a positive effect on their satisfaction level with the repatriation process and consequently increased their commitment to stay with the company. From this perspective, *Proposition 4* expressing “*A repatriate’s motivation to accept an international assignment is related to his or her commitment with the company of origin*” can be confirmed, however differs in the kind of motivation. In cases where the motivation of going abroad is only career related is different to the ones who had personal interest such as to experience cross-cultural adventures. It can be concluded that companies need to understand what the expatriate’s motivations are when taking over an overseas assignment in order to understand or even predict their expectations upon return.

Another finding has been the relationship between the experience abroad and the willingness to keep working for the company of origin after international assignment. Literature introduced that expatriates who have adjusted well abroad and who had an overall positive experience abroad are less vulnerable to be confronted with thoughts to leave the home company after completing the placement abroad (Black, Mendenhall and Oddu, 1991, Black et al., 1992; Gregersen & Stroh, 1999, Feldman & Thompson, 1993; Sulaymonov, 2017). All interviewed candidates claimed they have been satisfied with the overall expatriation assignment and highlighted to have spent a very valuable and interesting time abroad. Interviewing the candidates if they would take up another international assignment, all have been answered with yes. Interestingly they pointed out that it depends for how long the IA would be and to which country they would go but overall the motivation and willingness was positive. Having felt well overseas minimized the possibility to look for jobs abroad as there was no reason to do so, if repatriates were returning happy. In that context, the author of this thesis confirms *proposition 5* “*A positive experience abroad can have a positive impact on the decision making to stay with the home company*”.

Secondary research revealed that an extraverted and open-minded individual with proactive behaviour personality are more likely to show interest in gaining new information about the current job market, including the competition. Proactive repatriates have been considered as active agents who seek to take the best opportunity even if it means to leave the current home company. It has been explored that these repatriates are more likely to accept an offer from another employer and thus are considered to be more difficult to retain (O’Sullivan, 2002; O’Sullivan 2013). However, findings of this thesis have provided evidence that these

personality traits are not necessarily an indicator of being more vulnerable to leave the home organization after repatriation but in turn can also have a positive impact on staying committed to the home company. Candidates stated that they proactively started to contact managers of different departments in the home country to introduce themselves and to let them know that they are looking for a new opportunity in the home company. Proactively networking with diverse colleagues to find the best suited position upon return. In this sense, proactive behaviour does not necessarily mean to look outside the company but rather be a facilitator aspect when considering the retention of these repatriates. The author of this dissertation thus concludes that *Proposition 6* which stated that Proactive personality traits can be regarded as predictors of repatriate turnover can be rejected as findings indicated that it can also have a positive impact on a repatriate's commitment with the company.

Researchers claimed that neglecting the importance of repatriation by not providing a repatriation plan with a concrete policy can have a negative impact on the retention of repatriates (Furuya et al., 2009, Kraimer et al., 2009 & Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Interviewing the eight interview candidates, results show that the factors which increased their commitment towards the company were the support actions which they received from the home company, while being abroad as well as upon return. All candidates agreed that companies should provide supportive measures to repatriates in order to ensure that their readjustment runs smoothly. Research shows that especially upon return, readjustment is often more difficult than the adjustment to the host country. Adjustment is a multifaceted phenomenon and does not only affect adjustment to work but also the general living environment. Two interview candidates returned from their overseas placement with new born kids. For them the readjustment to the home country has been difficult due to the simple fact that their family has been extended and thus more administrative work was waiting for them and a bigger house needed to be found in a short period of time. Receiving support from the company side during this period is crucial for repatriates to minimize the issues they face when readjusting to the home country. Providing a list of available kinder-garden places for repatriate's kids or consulting repatriates in finding a suitable real estate are just few examples of where the company could provide a hand. Consequently, it can be confirmed that a smooth readjustment process has a positive impact on the retention of repatriates and thus can be brought into line with *proposition 2*.

Furthermore, support to find a secure job position upon return has been introduced as fundamental. Interviewees claimed that the application process to get into a job position that meets the repatriate's objectives is only doable if the company provides support as for example having an explicit HR unit that takes care of returnees before they returned to make sure that

upon return an attractive position is available. One form of providing support has been a written commitment provided by the company which indicated that the company takes responsibility to find an appropriate job for the repatriate upon return. Especially for employees who's company has outsourced specific departments abroad, and had to return without having the possibility get back in their previous department, these repatriates indicated that the written statement provided by the company has influenced their decision to stay with the company positively. This finding can be linked to the *first proposition* in this thesis which stated "*Repatriates with less uncertainty upon return are more likely to stay with the company of origin*". Finding a secure job position and receiving thereby a written commitment is an act of reducing the level of uncertainty. In this sense the author can support *proposition 1* with the findings of this study.

Moreover, repatriates pointed out that preparation from the company side is key. Interview candidates emphasized the importance of an accurate preparation of the repatriation process and being transparent during the whole expatriation life cycle. Interviewees claimed that in order to avoid frustration, the repatriation process should be organized in a transparent manner to ensure that repatriates feel secure during the whole cycle. Additionally, they stated that preparation is crucial as it ensures a repatriate's feeling of belonging and welcoming once completing the IA. Some interviewee provided ideas on how companies can ensure these to aspects and argued that well organized repatriation programs can have immense impact on their satisfaction level and consequently on the decision to not leave the home firm. To link it to previous literature, the author wants to emphasise that it has been confirmed by researchers that companies who provide repatriates with an extensive repatriation program which starts to discuss return topics already before expatriates go abroad in order to prepare them for their return are more successful in retaining expatriates. In this respect, *Proposition 7* can be confirmed which stated that retention of repatriates can be increased if companies implement repatriation programs.

Moreover, research revealed that repatriates often experience career anxiety if the company is not able to provide new career opportunities to the returning expatriate or if long-term planning and career advancement lack effectiveness. As a consequence, repatriates are more likely to thrive for other opportunities outside their home company. As during the overseas assignment repatriates have been exposed to new experiences, diverse challenges and continuous learning repatriates seek to receive new opportunities and being offered a long-term planning of their career in order to know what is coming next (Dowling and Welch, 2004). According to the interviewees, career planning has been highly important and depended on the

number of assignments they have been on, their career goals differed. Candidates who have been abroad once, were looking to find a new opportunity in a different department as they have been before, to avoid doing the same as before the IA. They claimed that in a different department, they would be able to learn new skills, gain more knowledge and keep the learning curve as they experienced abroad. Additionally, all 8 interviewed repatriates keep being interested to take up another assignment abroad as they believe they benefited highly from their stay abroad. On the other hand, repatriates who have been abroad more than once, emphasized especially after the second or third time abroad, the long-term career planning was key when negotiated to eventually go abroad again. As candidates who went up to three times abroad, have age range from 50 years upward, they are more anxious about what happens when they return. In this respect they emphasized the importance of having the career planned beforehand in order to feel secure in case they go abroad again. To conclude one can say that companies who plan careers in the long-term and offer advancement to their employees are crucial indicators to retain repatriates, as formulated in *proposition 9*.

Another crucial empirical finding has been the importance of maintaining contact with the company of origin during the time an expatriate is working abroad. Interview candidate C stated: “*I’ve always had a lot of contact to my home base, to my bosses and also to my colleagues. So the bond did not crack down. I was abroad, but I always had communications and contact and discussions.*” (Interview C). Interview candidates stressed being in constant contact with the organization of origin, which ensured them to be up to date on what is going on as well as providing them with a feeling of belonging and not being forgotten although being overseas. Also, secondary researched introduced a term called out of side syndrome which affects repatriates who have lost contact with the home base and as a result feel that they are not being needed anymore by the company. Often it drives repatriates to then take the decision to leave the company (Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Black and Gregersen, 1991). It should be pointed out that several candidates of this study underlined the importance of always keeping up on what is going on in the home country and that this a precondition to find an accurate job upon return as it is the only way to maintain and grow your network. Against this background *proposition 10* can be confirmed with doubt, as it proofed to be one of the most impacting factors to retain repatriates successfully.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework of this thesis, Gregersen (1992) conducted a study in which results show that role clarity and role discretion are positively associated with the satisfaction level of a repatriate’s new job. According to this, *proposition 8* has been formulated as “*Role clarity from an early stage can have a positive impact on the decision to*

stay with the company”. In regard to this proposition, the author was not able to confirm it, as findings of this dissertation did not entail answers to the importance of role clarity in relation to the decision to stay with the company. However, it has been possible to introduce a new aspect which covers role clarity as well but from a repatriate’s perspective. Interview candidates said that the new position in the company of origin should consider the learnings and knowledge he or she has obtained abroad. They emphasised that applying learnings in the job is crucial to feel satisfied with the new job position. As mentioned earlier, employees who have spent several years working abroad have specific expectations on how their new job role should look like. In this sense, one big task of the company is to understand what the repatriate favours in his new job position and thereby ensuring that the new tasks are clear to both repatriate and the company itself to ensure alignment of expectations. From this point of view one can formulate the new finding as: Companies who understand a repatriate’s expected job role can ensure role clarity to the repatriate and consequently will be more successful in retaining repatriates.

The last proposition (*proposition 11*), involves the importance of knowledge transfer and group composition as being an influencing factor in regard to the decision making process of returning employees to not leave the home base. Literature introduced that positive interpersonal relationships with colleagues can positively impact the sense of connection and order of the repatriate. The quality of relationships with superiors and co-workers are said to ease the adjustment process of repatriates and simultaneously reduces uncertainty when interacting with home company workforce (Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley, 1999; Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008; Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). What has been revealed in the findings section is the importance of a good relationship with the superior of the home company. Thereby candidate F stated “*I had a great personal relationship to my boss, which made me feel safe on my leave. And I was very positively thinking about my return. So I basically just put it into the back of my mind. I didn't really bother much*” (Interview F, 2020), which can be regarded as an indicator that the quality of relationship does have an impact on the satisfaction level of the overall assignment and the increased likelihood to stay committed with the headquarter. One can further argue that a good relationship is key, however the type of relationship the repatriate has with its co-workers is also crucial. This can be further linked to the importance of having regular contact with the team during expatriation. In this sense one can confirm that *proposition 11* can partially be confirmed as in regard to knowledge transfer no findings could be matched.

6. Conclusion

The underlying research question of this thesis was “*What motivates repatriates to stay with the home company after completing their international assignment?*” whereby the objective was to identify the motives that impact repatriates when taking the decision to stay with the home company. The aim was to learn from repatriates who stayed with the company in order to provide recommendations to companies on how to successfully retain their repatriates. Thereby the author focused on two main areas of research factors which included individual aspects and organizational driven aspects. The overall findings of the primary research show that a repatriate’s motivation to not quit his job when returning back to the home base is not exclusively influenced by one single factor but rather by many small ones which are interconnected and multifaceted and consequently make one big impact on their decision. Six main categories, have been elaborated to have the greatest impact on the process when deciding to stay with the company of origin. Thereby, each category involved subcategories which were labelled as codes. In particular, the expectations a repatriate has upon return (category 1) and the contact with the home company while being overseas (category 6) were perceived as most influential motives. Secondary literature revealed that repatriation is often neglected or considered as less important in comparison to expatriation. However, researchers agree that repatriation is at least as important as all other steps of the overall IA, due to the fact that it is interconnected and does not finish once the expatriate is send abroad. With this background, repatriation should be planned in much detail before sending the employee abroad. Further it was stated that a successful readjustment of repatriates back to the home country, the formation of job related expectations, the motivation to take over an overseas assignment as well as certain personality traits are indicators of why a repatriate decides to either stay or leave after returning from the IA. Another area of research, focused on organizational aspects such as a supportive human resources department, job characteristics, repatriation programs as well as knowledge transfer and quality of relationship, to be very important when trying to understand how to avoid repatriate turnover. On the base of factors that affect repatriates to stay or leave the home company upon return, propositions in regard to the motivation of repatriates to stay have been formulated.

The results from the qualitative analysis give evidence that repatriates form expectations which impact different areas of work. These expectations have a positive impact on the retention of repatriates if they are met or over met. Once repatriate’s expectations cannot be met, by the company or the repatriate itself it will have a negative impact on the decision making of the repatriate. Further it should be pointed out that especially the alignment of repatriate

expectations and the company's expectation or objective is an aspect that needs to be taken into consideration when aiming to increase the retention level of repatriates. To do so the company needs to understand clearly what the repatriate expects upon his return in order to be able to meet them or at least to provide him support to ensure satisfaction.

Findings of this study further provided evidence that there is a relationship between a repatriate's motivation to go on a foreign assignment and his expectation upon return and consequently his motivation to stay with the home company after finalizing his stay abroad. Four main types of motivations have been identified: career driven motivation, adventure seeking, a combination of both career and personal interest and lastly organizational driven motives such as transfer of headquarter to a foreign country. If motivation was affected mostly by career interest, it was more difficult for repatriates to find an accurate job upon return as often expectations resulted to be too high and the company was not able to meet them. On the other hand, motivations that have been driven by personal interest proofed to have the biggest impact on the willingness to stay committed with the company as expatriates described the IA as an opportunity that the company offers to the employee, which should not be taken for granted. This resulted in a higher motivation to stay with the company of origin. The probably most interesting conclusion was that employees emphasised that companies who send employees abroad need to be aware of the motives a repatriate has when taking up an IA. In this regard, organizations should have regular meetings with expatriates, starting already in the selection process of whom to send abroad, in order to understand their main motives and how they are changing throughout the whole international assignment life cycle. Only by doing so retention of repatriates can be increased.

Proactive behaviour and extravert personality traits have been identified by literature to be indicators of a repatriate's openness to seek for alternative job opportunities in other companies. Findings of this thesis however, indicate that the same personality traits can also have predictive character when analysing the motives to stay with the home country. Proactive behaviour such as taking action to show interest to look for a position in the headquarter upon return or actively reach out to the HR department to inform themselves about possible open positions to find a new job position in the home base. Repatriates with these characteristics resulted to be more cooperative when it comes to finding an accurate job upon return and increased the level of willingness to stay with the company. In regard to the retaining repatriates it can be concluded that these repatriates are more easily to handle based on their cooperative mind-set. However, companies need to be able to detect these repatriates in an early stage in order to act as a compliant supporter and to ensure that the repatriate does not get the feeling that all his effort

is going nowhere. In this sense, a very intensive pre selection of suitable candidates to be send abroad should be taken to make sure that companies know their employees well.

Moreover, it has been discovered the higher the support a company provides to its returning employees the higher the willingness is to stay. Secondary literature emphasized the importance of repatriation plans as well as HR departments that provide repatriates with supportive tools and strategy's to adjust well in the home company. The results of this thesis, show that support should cover the following dimensions: Issues in regard to family readjustment and issues related to work. It was stated that companies should take into account a repatriate's family situation and provide supportive measures according to the issues each family might face. These measures should be planned beforehand by regularly contacting with the repatriate to discuss with him possible challenges he might face and where he or she would wish to be supported. This support should also be given further when aiming to ensure that the repatriate receives a job that complies with his expectations. The more exchange between superior from the home company with the repatriate abroad existed the more satisfied did the repatriate feel upon return which consequently influenced his decision-making process to stay with the company positively.

Company characteristics and communication have been the last two categories identified by the author of this thesis. In the bundle of company characteristics, the researcher included that being transparent with the employee in regard to job and non-job related variables, is crucial when aiming to minimize the often poor perception repatriates have in regard to the overall repatriation. Although interviewed candidates still work for the company, it should be pointed out that all indicated that companies still have to improve on making the repatriation process at least as planned as the expatriation process, emphasizing that repatriation requires more attention and effort. Ensuring that repatriates feel part of the company strategy and that the international assignment has been one important fragment of their long-term career life cycle with the organization, helps returning employees feeling needed, appreciated and honoured for their commitment they have taken to go abroad as well as to take the decision to stay with the company.

Lastly, regular contact and qualitative communication between the home and host base is crucial to ensure a continuous bond between co-workers abroad and the home company. Findings provide evidence that the more contact existed between home and host the more satisfied the repatriate was about his return as he never lost the connection with his colleagues. As literature specified that repatriates are often affected by the out of sight syndrome upon return, it needs to be understood that repatriates do not want to feel forgotten and seek to be up

to date on what is happening at the home base at all times as it helps them enormously to adjust more easily upon return. Thereby it was suggested by interviewed candidates that regular group meetings with the home country need to take place with the purpose of talking about the current situation in the home company as well as possible opportunities that repatriates could take upon their return.

Nevertheless, it should be stated that the findings of the research paper are limited, due to various types of biases. In regard to the interview procedure, the author faced the following limitations. First of all, the type of answers proved to be often very general and sometimes unclear due to the fact that although the candidates decided to stay with the company, they often tended to talk more about what things did not go well and what the company could have done better. Thereby, trying to understand their motives of why they stayed instead of leaving has been sometimes difficult to identify. Thus, it should be noted that some interviewees might have provided only partial information. Secondly, all participants moved back to the same home country, Germany, which makes the study less reliable due to the fact that the researcher was not able to analyse the motives of repatriates for staying committed to the home base in the context of other home countries. Because interview responses have been very specific to the individual's perspective and perception and the sample size of 8 interview candidates is relatively small, the data saturation might not be achieved. Moreover, the author faced difficulties, by having a limited travel opportunity due to COVID-19 pandemic to conduct research, collect and analyse the data.

Future research should increase the sample size to ensure the data saturation. In the light of offering companies, a better understanding of what motivates repatriates to stay with the home company and to decide not to quit their job in the home base it is advisable for further research, to interview human resources representatives as well. This will help to analyse what strategy they have and what action they take to retain repatriates. Analysing the point of view of HR and comparing it to the point of view of repatriates in order to understand where similarities are and where disparities exist can be a beneficial for further research. Further HR could examine their view of retention strategies which could be aligned to what is expected by the repatriates.

To conclude, the author would like to state that international assignments should be viewed as a multifaceted cycle of interconnected phases which need to be carefully planned from the very beginning by particularly paying attention on the last phase (repatriation) in order to ensure a high retention rate of repatriates. Not with standing, companies need to make a special effort to provide repatriates with the feeling of being appreciated, needed and valued. Appreciating

the effort expatriates take to go abroad, informing them of what value they bring to the company, ensuring that an accurate job position after the IA is provided and that the repatriate feels that he is part of the whole repatriation plan are key aspects to be considered when designing the repatriation strategy/program. To achieve a bond with the repatriates, a company has to focus on the needs of the repatriate. To identify these needs, carefully listening and constant contact are key rules. Hence, companies need to understand the mentioned motives that influence employees to stay with the home company by providing them with repatriation program that addresses repatriates needs accordingly.

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Appendix A

Interview guideline

Part 1 - Introduction

- Welcome research participant and thank him/her
- Introduce topic of research and purpose of the study

Part 2 – Overall information about the international assignment

- Please introduce yourself
- On how many international assignments have you been?
- What was the duration of them?
- Where has the international assignment taken place?
- Have you been accompanied by your family?

Part 3 – The international assignment – Motivation

- Tell me about your experience abroad? Did you enjoy being abroad? Did you do things that were (not) possible to do in your home country?
- What expectations did you have before going abroad? Did you achieve those expectations? Why?
- How would you grade the overall international assignment?
- What was your motivation to go abroad? Have you asked to or was it self-initiated?
- What do you think was the reason the company send you abroad?
- Tell me about your assignment (Tasks, Responsibility)

Part 4 – Expectations

- What kind of expectations did you have upon your return?
 - Any of them related to work? Use of skills, compensation?
 - Have you made false assumptions?
 - Did you experience any reverse culture shock?
 - Have your expectations been met regarding your return process?
 - Do you think you have formed realistic expectations?

Part 5 – Adjustment back to the home country

- Tell me about your repatriation
 - Did you encounter any difficulties? At work, with home nationals in the general living environment?
 - How did you deal with them?
 - Did the difficulties you faced influenced your commitment to your home company?
 - On your return (or even before) did you consider changing company?

Part 6 – Supportive Repatriation process

- Did your company support you upon return? How? What measures did they use?
- When have they started to support you?
- Have you been satisfied with their support?
-

Part 7- Future expectations

- Do you want to go abroad? Why?
- If so, do you have any plan to go abroad?
- Or, does your company intend to send you again?

Appendix B

Table of code

Theme	Category	Code	Quote
Individual characteristics	Expectations	Job grade	“I would have a certain expectation to the job grade. I would not do a job that would be below my previous one. (...) But yet, to find something on a comparable base/level. I think that was my expectation.” (IC G)
		Job role	“So there was a clear expectation from my end about that I will be offered a role, which is considering the amount of learning, the amount of expectation of knowledge that I gained, especially in the context of international business, which is always a very sensitive piece of the cake in mid-sized German companies.” (IC F)
		Job type offered upon return	“I got an interesting job offer in the headquarters in Germany, which allowed me to further grow and further gain experience. So therefore, I honestly did not have really thought to leave the company.” (IC H)
		Salary and responsibility expectations	“So the expectations I had were a job on a certain salary level, that was point number one, second thing to have responsibility also for personnel also having responsibility for a bigger business, ideally having direct reporting line to the business unit head. (IC H)
		Horizontal movement	“I think you cannot always expect that's going up and up, even if you are high in the organisation. It is even harder and harder to get higher every time. (IC G)
		Job guarantee	“I have to say that my expectation was pretty low right from the beginning because I've heard it already and I've started to get some exchange with colleagues in order to get a little bit of understanding about how it works. And one thing I've heard right from the beginning was that repatriation means not that you have directly a job guarantee (...).” (IC E)
		Alignment of company and expat expectation	“It's a development for you on the one hand, on the other end of course to fill out the needs of the company, it is kind of a trunk contract. So both sides are aware about what is the expectation.” (IC C)

		Application of knowledge	<p>“I was expecting to have my learnings, my achievements, my development, being honoured in a new position (...) it is the only reason for staying. Absolutely. So you go out, you learn something. You perform. And then you want to apply whatever you learned there to your new job. And if that can be the case, if they allow you to do so, in my case, do exactly that on a broad scale, that is perfect. I mean, there is no there is no better way” (IC F)</p>
		Honouring of learnings	<p>“It is the only reason for staying. Absolutely. So you go out, you learn something. You perform. And then you want to apply whatever you learned there to your new job. And if that can be the case, if they allow you to do so, in my case, do exactly that on a broad scale, that is perfect. I mean, there is no there is no better way”.</p>
	Motivation to accept an international assignment	Personal Interest	<p>“To be honest, my motivation was in both cases, not the step after, so coming back and then say, okay, now I want to make career, now I want to have at least the next level or something like this. This was for sure not my intention (...) so for me my motivation was always to have the chance to work or to live in a different cultural background, do this kind of adventure and getting new experiences” (IC A);</p> <p>“So any opportunity going abroad, we would take just also for the sake of the kids, because I think it's the best thing you can do for your kids to be really metropolitan and having a different mind-set (IC B)</p>
		Career Interest	<p>“Well, at least it was one important step of my career, in XY there is a certain philosophy which at all times is of great importance (...) to grow to make your career to complete knowledge in different areas” (IC C)</p>
		Career and Personal Interest combined	<p>“It was kind of a mixture. So it was part of my career plan to go abroad (...) then there was also a private motivation to go abroad. Kind of an adventure seeking, indeed. So trying to do something differently and also to join that specific part of the life with the family abroad. That was also something. So not only my personal thing, but also for the family to get a development thing for the family” (IC D)</p>

		Company driven factors	“I wouldn't say we had no chance. But we were transferring an entire business or the global headquarters from the company, from Germany to Shanghai. And of course, with that, all the top managers, more or less were, I wouldn't say were forced, that's the wrong word because you can't force somebody. But it was somehow expected that you go with a business, especially in my case, as I was project lead for the headquarter relocation, it was pretty clear that I go with the business” (IC G)	
		Personal attitudes	Extravert personality	“I've started to kind of to bring myself back into their minds. So be more present again in Germany. So I took a chance during business trips in Germany in order to meet with different senior manager in different function in order to introduce myself and to address my interests and that I would like to go back” (IC E)
			Seniority level	“I have been working with XY company already for more than 20 years. And actually, this is also one of the reasons why I'm still with the company” (IC B)
Organizational aspects	Company characteristics and opportunities	Transparency	“I think to avoid a kind of frustration upon return, it must be pretty transparent” (IC A)	
		Company strategy of belonging	“I was part of the team. That's the important thing. I felt that what we are doing outside was really an important part of the puzzle. And indeed it was (...). I felt I was part of the team. Part of the strategy. So I felt very well or comfortable, and that's why I didn't look to others.” (IC C)	
		Appreciation	“Nobody would leave the company if they really feel there are needed” (IC E); “On management level there was enough appreciation” (IC F)	
		Fairness	“It is really the appreciation of the company, that people who show flexibility going abroad, are sometimes not valued, especially not valued on a similar level as people that just stay at home” (IC E)	
		Career opportunities	“And that's why I appreciate to work for a big group and maybe one day we have a chance again to go abroad so now it's less about me, I have to say but rather also about what is the overall circumstance to work for the family as well. And then I think it's quite cool.” (IC B)	

		Job position	“For me, the most important thing is really to feel supported when coming back by the management that you have the feeling somebody really is supporting you to find a new position” (IC A)
		Preparation	“All repatriates need to be prepared from the expectation point of view right from the beginning in order to say, well, you are going abroad on a concrete position, that is something which is now. Once you will go back, there is not a position for you automatically available. There is starting a kind of interview application process for the position, and that is something which you need to be aware of. I think that is a very important element because than people can manage that kind of expectation right from the beginning and it's part of the deal to go as an expatriate” (IC E)
	Company support	Family consideration	“But the employer should really consider the overall family situation of someone as well. And especially if they do not have to offer you a proper job, an interesting job” (IC B); “HR should have on their checklist, not only the person in the company that goes abroad and repatriated as well but the entire family does and perhaps take something into account that there is a feeling of careness, which means not that the company needs to find a job for the spouse or whatever to spend more money. It's really, I would say, appreciation and the kind of careness for the people related to it” (IC E)
		Written commitment	“And there I mean, that is maybe one additional thing the company provided, that was helpful, at the very end for most of the people, a clear commitment that they would take care once you go back that you will find a decent job. Of course, there was no guarantee for a certain job. There was no guarantee for a higher job grade or higher salary. It was more the commitment for fair treatment. We find something. Don't worry if you go, we will honour that”
		Housing	“Yes, definitely. Having the house makes it much easier I would not say an entire prerequisite, but makes coming back and getting familiarized with your old life much more easy”. (IC G)

		Relationship	<p>“The bond is created in communication. So communication and an interchange of a dialogue about your work. About how far you have gone with your project. Is everything running well? There has to be communication” (IC C); “I had a great personal relationship to my boss, which made me feel safe on my leave. And I was very positively thinking about my return. So I basically just put it into the back of my mind. I didn't really bother much” (IC F)</p>
		Regular contact	<p>“I've always had a lot of contact to my home base, to my bosses and also to my colleagues. So the bond did not crack down. I was abroad, but I always had communications and contact and discussions.” (IC C)</p>
	Communication and contact	Human Resources Department	<p>“Regular meetings from the home country with a dedicated HR person. Regular calls every quarter, every half a year, meeting together with the HR home manager and the related expatriates in order to discuss certain aspects what could happen (...) especially focusing on those things such as repatriation in order to start the discussion provide the feeling that somebody is taking care of you during the expatriation time itself” IC E);</p> <p>“In XY its usually that you always have contact with your home, with your headquarter. The opportunity to talk also to the human resources department for further reasons because you have to find new staff for your rising company. So you're in constant contact also with the Department of Human Resources. So that's a big advantage” (IC C)</p>

Appendix C

Interview Transcripts

Note: Due to privacy reasons, names of the candidates as well as firm names are not given. Both have been modified to XY abbreviations.

Interview Candidate A

Researcher: “Welcome, XY to this interview session and thank you very much for your time, to share your experiences to the repatriation topic. The objective of the thesis is to find out what motivates repatriates to stay with their home country company after they have successfully finished their international assignment abroad. Studies reveal that a lot of repatriates actually leave their company in the first two years after they returned. And this is a big problem for companies because at the end they're losing valuable resources. It's a loss of investment. Due to the fact that there are a lot of studies already on this area, why they leave, in contrast there are not many studies on why the people stay. I want to focus more on this part. In this sense as you have been abroad and you returned to your home company, I think you fit very good to the focus group. To start, I would like you to introduce yourself. Tell me a bit on how many international assignments you have been where and how long? How long have you been back already? Have you been with your family? What was your job position? Just like overall Summary kind of.”

Candidate A: “My name is XY. I'm now almost 25 years with the company, maybe it's also one of the reasons why some older people may stay because they're pretty close to the company. It's my second assignment. That was 10 years to 12 ½ years back. Me and my family, we moved to Switzerland for almost three years and we returned 10 years back almost. And this was the first assignment. At that time, we transferred the business from Germany down to Switzerland. And so it was a quite interesting job. I mean, building up this whole organization that set up and that we acquired at the time some small sized companies

throughout Europe. One of the task was to integrate them into our company, so I was traveling at that time quite a bit, but it was also really building up something new being together with a young team, doing things very, very interesting. Then normally this assignment was planned to be five to seven years originally. But after three years, I mean, there was an open position in Germany and on a very, very short notice, I would say I think at six weeks they asked me to come back. I mean, at the end, we knew said somehow that the family could stay a little bit longer and then I was commuting between Leverkusen and Bern, which was ok, at least for five or four months or something like that. But then I really had a very, very interesting position in Germany, I was than the regional product of a business and strategic business entity. So it's a product group within the company and so, of course, at that time, I think the motivation was really to have an interesting job and I don't want to call it power, but of course, I mean, you were involved in all these important things, you could make decisions, I was really empowered to run this business more or less on my own. So I think this was at that time a very high motivation. The second assignment we started back in 2016 also on a short notice. I mean, it was an opportunity which came up, I think we were informed in May about the potential option. And at the end of the day, the first idea was to start their first of July, which was not possible at all but we started on 1st of August, which I think for a moving from Germany to Hong Kong, selling all the cars and whatever, renting out the house and on top we had also a few weeks vacation planned within this period. So it was really a very intense time, I would say. And then in Hong Kong, I had a similar job which I had in Leverkusen at that time. I was a product manager for what we call isocyanate, another big product group for Europe, Middle East, Africa and LATAM. And then I had the opportunity to do the same in Hong Kong at the beginning for APEC. I think our biggest market and this content so far. So what was a drive for me to go there? I think it was living a different culture. I always wanted to work in Asia, especially in Southeast Asia when I was a student. And since

then, I want to be an expat, I want to work and live in Southeast Asia. I really like the culture, I like the people and it's very dynamic and interesting markets and so this opportunity was really great. I was also happy that my family at least my wife I mean, we didn't ask the kids but my wife was also pretty positive to go there. I was a little bit surprised because she was not too much into Asia and she wasn't before in Asia and to be honest, our house hunting trip was not the easiest experience for her at that time but we had already more or less signed the whole things and we had a really a pretty good time there. So my position changed during the three years we had two reorganisations in that time. So first, adding additional responsibilities in all three product groups I was responsible for. And with the bigger reorganization and introducing a new steering level, I mean, the core was the same, but we added there more responsibility. And then deal with these steering and driving the sales organization somehow, so very interesting but the assignment was limited for three years. Also, from my wife's perspective, because she wanted to go back and work. I mean, so the agreement was really three years and not more. I think also the timing was perfect for us. My older daughter when we moved to Hong Kong she just changed the school so coming from the primary school and starting secondary school is the perfect timing. And now when we returned last year August, it was the younger one, who finished the primary school and started the secondary school here. Here I'm doing again, more or less the same thing. After all the reorganisations, I have now the opportunity to do the same thing again for Europe, Middle East, Africa and Latin America. That is really a kind of motivation. I mean, it's a new organization we are introducing new steering processes and we are developing them, introducing them and also the structure how we are selling our products and how to steer, and together with data science driven steering processes, so a lot of change is going on and this is simply fun. I mean for the family I think the move back was more or less ok. We had some trouble with, I think, our company. they outsourced these services around expatriation or repatriation or

whatever, the moving. Many, many years back this was all centralized but then they looked for services externally and it was twice a similar thing. In Switzerland this was very, very new. They had a new company at that time. So that was Brookfield Relocation Services, they were new and didn't know about our company processes at that time and it was a big fight about what is in and what is not and who was responsible for what. Moving into Switzerland was problematic because they were new. Three years later, they moved us back. It was already pretty OK. Almost six years later, we moved with the same company Brookfield to Hong Kong, which did the service very excellent. And then we changed now again. And another company won the whole thing. They were new when we moved back to Germany and I must say it was chaotic, very intransparent and a pretty low level. They messed up a few things. I think it was also for our company quite costly. For my wife of course, it's nice to be here back and to be back to work, so she had the opportunity to go back into her old job. We also, I think this was also nice from the company or we negotiated that we got the promise that she can work also in Hong Kong. But with the kids and the distance between our house and the company it would have never worked out. I mean, it's quite, at least the first two, one or three years, intense with the kids, all this arriving process in Hong Kong and things like that. But I think she was also okay at the end of the day not working, but now she's happy to be back. Kids first, especially the older one, first she hated Hong Kong for one year. Now, coming back to Germany, it is even worse I mean, it's now almost one year. I think she's getting now used to. She's now fine with Germany, but still she has a lot of contact to Hong Kong. The good and the bad thing at the same time is due to all the smart phone applications you can have a really close relationship to your old friends, which helps you, of course and that's a great thing and then hopefully she'll keep the contacts as she kept them here in Germany. On the other hand, it makes it also hard always to start a new life. I mean, it's still that old life is there. Me, I mean, it's more about me and why I don't want to leave the company.

First of all, it's an interesting position. I mean, this is always the most important thing. What I also observed is to be that often the contract expires and then the company suddenly says, oh, three years are over we have to bring him back or her back and suddenly they have no position for them. Then maybe, I don't know they give you a project thing or whatever or something which is not really thought through and then the people are sitting there with no position and no real task. I mean it's a newly generated position and the roles and responsibilities are not clear and everybody is aware of this that it is simply an emergency solution and it's not well planned. I mean, normally I would say they have plenty of time and I think the worst thing is really contract end and then nobody has a better thing. If you know that within the next, I don't know, one year and a half years, somebody needs to come back somehow to be flexible on some of the three years kind of hard cut, which is, of course, always not easy with kids, but then if there is an opportunity, we need to do it smart and bring people that maybe a little bit earlier back or a little bit later, but having something which is, well, you can really make use of them as a company and also not frustrate them. The second big thing, and this is also really a little bit problematic for myself. If you are working abroad, normally it's small at least if it's the headquarters here and if you go abroad, I mean, you have a much higher independency. You can do beside whatever many, many things without always trying to align this with many different people in the headquarters. The metric structure is much bigger at the end of the day, it's the same time zone. Everybody wants to be involved in. The nice thing of being abroad is you're getting used to speed. Of course, you cannot change the whole culture of a company. And somehow the expatriate needs to learn that things are different in the headquarter but we are getting better over the time. But, of course, I mean, once you have this experience there might be the thinking that it's nicer to work for a smaller company where you have this entrepreneur thinking and things like that. This could be something which is sometimes the motivation. A friend of mine who was eight years in Shanghai. So pretty long, for a different

company. When we met you the first time here in Germany I only said it is hard to get used to all this tight organisational things and to slow down. He said, yeah, let's be honest for the family coming back, it was very easy. It took only one or two months out of Shanghai at that time. Getting used to the headquarter feeling took him almost 10 years. I mean, this is maybe more a joke or something like that, but it's a little bit like that. And then, of course, maybe it could be something that you say it's too many people are involved and I want to do something more independent but you cannot really change this. The other thing, I got a very interesting position after I've done my assignment. And to be honest, my motivation was in both cases, not the step after, so coming back and then say, okay, now I want to make career, now I want to have at least the next level or something like this. This was for sure not my intention. I always liked to travel, I love to be on being on business trips and things like that so for me motivation was always to have the chance to work or to live in a different cultural background, do this kind of adventure and getting experience and being aware that there is the risk, because there is the very high risk that if you return one day you will do a project or something like this, there will be no good open position for you. There is no real development plan. But this is something which I observed already for ten, fifteen years before. I think I wouldn't have even been totally surprised if it wouldn't have worked out. I mean, I'm really lucky with how it worked out. And I think some people think they need to go to a different country and they are not doing it for themselves, they do it only for career reasons. And this is no good motivation at all. And I think to avoid at least this kind of frustration, it must be pretty transparent. Somebody is going abroad that this is not the first step of the new starting and career. It's something where the company is investing and giving the person the opportunity to broaden himself and then to become even a more developed person, but it's not necessarily the guarantee that you come back and then you are on the next level and then that's fast path. And this time in the different country, being abroad, and the investment into something

and he simply has to go through and survive somehow and then coming back, everything would be great if this is the motivation this will, I think, result in big frustration. And for me, it's more the other thing that it was a gift both times. And I'm really happy about that.”

Researcher: “Would you agree that on your return back, repatriates should keep their expectations quite low?”

Candidate A: “I think at the beginning already, if you go abroad, you should at least make clear that this is no guarantee. I mean, I would expect that this is an interesting job out there. And he gets the opportunity to live abroad and to do a very interesting job. But there is no guarantee after that that you will have a very nice job on the next level who can be also on the same level, but then you have broadened your skills and this might be than the right base for the next steps. But there is no guarantee out there. So and if this is clear from day one, it's clear before you agree to the assignment, I think then frustration might be not as big as it can be. I mean, and I think it's also very important to manage the whole thing is to have always close contact or that also the organization in the home country, that the host is taking care of the person somehow. Every half a year or whatever some contact that I'm talking about ambitions and so on, and not only the last two, three, four, five months or something like this. Once it's clear you might have a problem to find a good solution for the person something like that. But it's both. I think it's not only the expat who should wait and think that somebody should care or to take care for him. Also, the expat needs to work on his network and keep close contact to the headquarter and the people who sent him out.”

Interviewer: “Do you agree that it is a combination of self-awareness as being aware that coming back has to be also an effort from yourself and from the company trying to have regular contact to the expatriate abroad. And not only at the end, but like already, let's say, when the expatriate goes abroad?”

Candidate A: “Yes, I think so. Also organizations are changing a lot and also people are changing. So often somebody is a person one that is sending someone abroad and reorganization or simply change of positions and then there is a new guy on the position and that the hand over somehow at least should include this this kind of handover of this expat. Because often sometimes people are forgotten abroad. I mean, this doesn't mean that there must be something every month or that you have the feeling somebody is really controlling you but it should be once, twice a year.”

Researcher: “What were your expectations regarding your job in the home country company? What expectations did you have? And were the expectations met?”

Candidate A: “I mean, it's the same hierarchy level and the same would be contract level is the same. I was on the same level when I left Germany and I'm on the same level coming back, which is totally fine. I mean, it also was within my expectations. And as I said earlier, for me, it was a gift that somebody gives me the opportunity to go abroad. So my expectation also what I saw in the last 10, 15 years from other people how it ended and my expectation were not too high. I mean, I was also fine. I would have been fine if I would have had kind of project or something like this for the first months until they find something for me. It was really a big desire to work in Asia and it was great. And I do not want to miss it. And then the risk which I took at that time was that I might may have had then a not nice job of course, I would have needed to check out. I mean, is there any future in the company or do I have to leave one day and then find something. But I was aware that the processes are working, that the open positions in our company and the likelihood that there is an open position on a similar level or above was low and I knew already when I went abroad but this was a risk I was willing to take because I thought it worked. And then, of course, I had the luck that everything worked out perfectly, but I was not nervous or something like this that something may not work out. I mean, there you also need some

flexibility. My family wanted to go back after three years. But we also agreed that I could up to half a year still do my job in Asia and then commute and my family moves back earlier and I stayed for another maximum half a year or something like that. So I think also from the expat side some flexibility is needed. I mean, this is really balancing out and reviewing always what was needed or what not needed. This is something which I think takes out and then listening to the people who are coming back. I mean. You have this and then, of course, it's always individuals. Some people are keen on this and others on that. I think it's not an easy task for the company because on the other hand, if you negotiate everything and everything is tailor made I mean how it was so many years back then, then people are also kind of frustrated. I mean, then they are abroad they meet some other expats and they hear he got money for this and money for that and then there are some extra clubs or whatever. And you were simply not aware of it and you feel a little bit cheated, this doesn't work out as well. This very clear guideline we have of what is in and what it's not in is helping. It is simply just what it is. You know what it's a contract like. And you can rely on this and this again something about culture or hygiene that everybody at least has a similar or identical package, which is also helpful to not feel cheated.”

Researcher: “Does this kind of strict guideline also exists when you're coming back, because I think especially when you're coming, it is very important that the company listens to repatriate.”

Candidate A: “I think, going abroad you get everything. I mean, you get a lot of support. Coming back, you get not too much support. Of course, shipping and things like that, but all the rest I thought they are overdoing it when we were abroad, you had always somebody around where I said let's explore the whole thing also a little bit by ourselves but coming back nothing. Of course, they say, and I think in our case, it's OK because we were only three years abroad, but there are no services at all. I mean, to going to register in your hometown and with the schools and whatever, you have to organize everything by

yourself. And I think it's still possible if you're like us, I mean, it was only three years, but I also heard from others being abroad two assignments in a row or something like six years or you had no kids before and then you tried to organize everything being 10000 kilometres away and I think also it is kind of frustrating element. Also for the families this is the risk that the families are under pressure a lot of work and some support would help. I think maybe the companies should spend less money for the people who go abroad and save a little bit money for coming home and getting there some support as well, especially for people who have longer assignments for maybe two assignments in a row or something.”

Researcher: “So summarizing it, what would be the three most important aspects in repatriation and which have made it at the end successful because you decided to stay with your company?”

Candidate A: “For me, the most important thing I think is. I mean, many things in a row. It's really to feel supported on the way coming back by the management that you have to feel somebody really is supporting you to find a new position. This is where the whole thing starts. And even if it does not work out that you know how people are thinking, trying, working on other plans or something like that. And that it is not like by an accident, oh he's coming back and they are happy that they've found a project and then nobody cares for them for the next months. I think this is a really important to feel that you are valued and they do their utmost really to give you a good job. And if this is communicated early enough, it's about expectation. Not necessarily, not the next level, that would be a similar level or whatever. It's more about the development of the person and of course, valuing that the headquarters spirit is going abroad and really supporting the entire company, so you're doing something useful abroad and then you come back and they value and they know that you developed. And of course, if you feel that they care and if you're lucky and you get directly a good job or at least later, then every everything is OK. I mean, this headquarter thing that I was talking about. I mean, you

simply have to accept this is what it is. What is a minor point is all this things around how to bring people back and to support them when coming back. I think this is not the trigger point for people leaving the company. I think it's all about the job and feeling appreciated and valued. People living and working all the time in the same company at the same place, they are most likely more afraid of new things. People being abroad, I mean, and then making experiences in a different environment that can integrate yourself doing new things. This is of course, something which is then in your mind. I mean, it's not that unthinkable to change something in your life. An experience outside being abroad lowers this barrier to change something. And I think this could be a general thing why people who were abroad in company may easier also say, OK, goodbye I'm looking for something new. So something you cannot change.”

Researcher:

„But as a company you can make a lot of work beforehand by showing appreciation by asking the expatriate how he's doing. What are his goals, like feeling this connection still to your headquarter and having the feeling of, OK, I'm welcome, I'm not forgotten. I went abroad for a reason. And all the points that you said I think make a huge difference. I have one last question. Would you with all your experience, I mean, you have been twice abroad and you have done the return twice. Would you go abroad again? “

Candidate A:

“I definitely. It would be another great adventure. For my kids I think they would also say yes. My wife, I am not so sure because she likes also her job and her social friends but I think yes also, she would say at the end. Yes, I think it was a great experience. Maybe one thing I forgot is also, of course, if the company is also supporting you and then then treating you pretty nice abroad not you, but your family too, I think this is also if you feel you're working for a good company and the company cares also for your family, because I think this is the most important thing, of course, that you have your surroundings. It shouldn't be the hardest life over there. On the other hand, that you are thankful and once you are a little bit stronger to your company.”

Researcher: “In which ways has the company supported your family?”

Candidate A: “I mean we had a pretty nice house. I think that's the most important thing. In our times. Tickets home or something like that for flying home. I mean, you can argue, but I think also the contact back for the family to the social environment they have here, is important and this might be also important because, I mean, if your family still feels home in your home base, I think then the family will not move away, if you say, OK, I go now from Leverkusen, to Leipzig because if your family is still bonded to the social network here, this could also help to increase the resistance somehow to change job and change the location again. But it is not much. I mean, it's really simply being treated well and matching somehow what is normal for these expats in the country. Then everything's fine. Well, it's too expensive.”

Researcher: “At the end, it's a lot of little factors that make the whole package. So you can not only give one and then with one facto it's fine, but it's just a combination of all of it. Very good. Thank you very much XY, for your time and for explaining all the things in a very detailed manner. “

Interview Candidate B:

Researcher: “I would like to give you a very warm welcome XY. Thank you very much for your time and to participate in this interview. I am conducting a study in regards to my master's thesis. I am looking into the field of repatriation and especially on the factors that impact repatriates to decide to stay with the company after they come back and what influences these people to stay. There are a lot of studies that reveal that a lot of repatriates actually leave the company after they come back, what often happens in the first two years due to various reason. Studies have been conducted on this field already. But researchers did not look into the reasons why people stayed. With this thesis I will like to make a deep dive in all the people that stayed and try to find connections. Could you start with introducing

yourself, where, you've been abroad. When? For how long have you been back already. And what was the purpose to leave? Did you go with your family? Like some kind of a summary of yours.”

Candidate B:

“So actually, I have been working with XY company already for more than 20 years. Actually, this is also one of the reasons why I am still with the company, because I always found there are so many opportunities to move around in one big group with many different functions, different job opportunities and this was mainly what always kept me within the group. I have to say, and I really mean it that, one of these major points and really the best time for me and our lives was that we had the chance to go to Brazil. This was in 2014 to 2017, end of 2017. We stayed in Sao Paulo and actually it was my husband and I who went and we came back with one little daughter and the pregnant from second one. So I have a very good influence of Brazil towards family life. So this was quite cool. And there I also had the chance not only to personally develop that is something that I am always looking forward, but also, I had a chance to lead an entire team or not only to lead up also establish a team which had not been a team before. I was bringing together various functions into one bigger organization and this was actually the challenge and also the opportunity I had, what I appreciated it very much and was mainly the reason that I immediately accepted. And here we are, when I came back that brings all the difficulties and that was why I have been almost leaving the company as well, because I have been very unsatisfied, because the companies do not plan ahead what to do with the people they have and also with people they have and which have aspirations and which have shown as it is that you can really deliver certain things as well. This was really the major driver. And, of course, I mean, coming back pregnant does also not help in a very conservative chemical German company. This was mainly the reason why I said, that I want to move into another area, which is a commercial function now, and that's why I wait ,but as it was quite hard as well when I came back to really find you opportunities due to

various reasons and not only my pregnancy, but also about a big restructuring program we have had with the company during this time. So there were no opportunities and at the end, everything was fine and after a year, I decided to start looking outside of the company because I mean, it's not worthwhile to wait for something which it does not appear. But nonetheless and I mean, this is maybe you will get more specific with this as well. So the major reason why I stated was the company and always hoped for another opportunity was that when I go external, I can only do it within the areas where I already had an experience, where I had work and business experience and as I wanted to move from supply chain to another area, commercial or sales in the specifics, this was the only chance really to get it, because internally, I think you really have the advantage that you have built your reputation, people know who you are, your network or you are known to a certain network which can help you as well to find another opportunity. But when you go external, the only thing you can show is really what you have in your track record in terms of business experience. So that's why I think this really makes quite a big difference as well when you are thinking about what opportunities you have staying or leaving the company.”

Researcher: “What would you say are the most important aspect that the company should have to take in mind when the repatriate is coming back.“

Candidate B: “The overall learning from me is that it's not just a contract that ends. But the employer should really consider the overall family situation as well, and especially if they do not have to offer you a proper job, an interesting job, I mean then I think it's getting even more worse if you're just pushed into it and they say, yeah, but your contract has finished, that's why you have to return. Our youngest one was fifteen months at the time when we went. I was pregnant from five months, so I think we just had a special family situation, we did not get much support. The employer should consider the overall family situation as well. So this is something where I would expect that a company should really taking more importance into consideration, not just

seeing the fact that a contract has ended, because in the end, we are human beings and we are not and other equipment they have bought or rented. This really makes a big difference for me, and this is something of what I was personally very unsatisfied with and where I also lost a lot of my loyalty I had towards the company at that time.”

Researcher: “When did the company reached out to you and tried to prepare you for your return. And also asking you about your family situation. When did everything start?”

Candidate B: “It was quite short notice. And this was the other thing which I did not like at all. I knew that my contract would end at the ends of September in 2017 but nonetheless, we only discussed in the end of July that I definitely have to return because they knew that I was looking for any other job opportunity also outside of Germany as long as it is something interesting, because we would have liked also to go. I was interested in also going somewhere else. That's why we never said dates when you really have to go back because we were looking for other opportunities as well. But then they decided end of July that I had to be back to Germany, to the office in Germany by 1st of October. So that's why we had two months really to reorganize our entire life and to move into regionally as well. And this is just giving the circumstance we had was not possible. I think it was just the entire package what really brought a lot of frustration with it.”

Researcher: “When did the company told you that you have to go back, did they introduce you to the new job position that you will have? Or was it just like you come back first and then we're going to look?”

Candidate B: “No, actually, I was brought back to a project position. This you only do if you do not have anything. I have to say I always said I do not want to get into a line function in the supply chain center again, because I do not want to stay there. That's why I mean, I also pushed for it to not become a line manager again because this would have kept me for another two or three years in that organization, which I was not interested in. But on the other hand, I think the project

position was the only thing that's really worthwhile to have in order to be able to move on rather quickly as well.”

Researcher: “Did you had the feeling that the company at this point was listening to you? I don't know. The HR Department of Global Mobility was listening somehow what you are actually interested in.”

Candidate B: “No, I think this is also something. I had been trying really to apply for some jobs before. But as I've said with the restructuring program and everything ongoing or in preparation, there were not so many jobs out in the company, so there was not so many possibilities to apply into certain positions. Plus that not having a background in sales does not help when you apply it into a sales function. So at this point you need to have the specific characteristics that they need for something where you can already bring some benefit to them as well. So that's why this was quite a difficult time. But no, I do not know whether this is specific to our company but HR never supports when it comes to finding new positions. It's either your own network or your line manager with his or her network to support you in getting somewhere.”

Researcher: “When you started also to look outside your company for jobs. I guess you had a lot of opportunities that you could have taken. What was the turning point at the end to say, I'm going to stay with the home company?”

Candidate B: “I was almost about to leave and this was mainly due to the fact that I said, I do not accept this, if they do not see my potential, then I have to leave, I have to do something different. That's why I was also rather getting in touch with a different recruiting and headhunting companies because I found this much more straightforward and valuable than just looking around for any job, because also at the level of job I am in it's not that easy anymore to find something appropriate. And maybe this was also the reason that I always said, that it's not that I'm totally frustrated with the things I'm doing here and at the end I have an overall quite interesting package. So it really

has to be the right move to leave the company as well. Based on this plus what I mentioned before that I would have to leave for a supply chain position again, this really always kept me from finally deciding on this as well. So actually, I had one very specific offer, but this was due to the location where my husband did not want to go, so we decided, no, it's not an option. But otherwise, this would definitely have been one of the things where I would have said, yes, I would be leaving for good reason and with a good perspective as well. But at the end, it was mainly the overall package and my aspiration moving towards commercial or sales function that kept me in. As I've said before, you do not have the chance leaving a company or moving to a new company to go into a completely new field without any official or track record or business experience.”

Researcher: “Could you compare a bit the process that the company was giving you and the expatriation process compared to the repatriation process? Are there any points that were really different that just say, OK, expatriation was super planned? And you already mentioned that repatriation when you were coming back was very fast and unorganized. What else was there?”

Candidate B: “No, actually, I think that the assumption for HR is always that you go into your home turf. So they do not need to support with anything. But just as is the fact that you need a new house, a new home, or in our case, that we needed to have a kindergarden as well. And you do not get any support for this, they did not help at all. And this brings a lot of stress and frustration with it.”

Researcher: “So on your way to Brazil, probably you had some support right?”

Candidate B: “No, I mean, there they organized everything. You have this intercultural training. You have this and this. And they really care about a lot of things. But coming back, no one thinks about or at least to ask where the company can support in order just to have a smoother return to Germany or to your home as well and this would have had been helpful.”

Researcher: “What else would you expect on your return to help? I mean, looking for a housing. Looking for a kindergarten. In what other topics could the company could also help?”

Candidate B: “No, actually, I mean in my situation, it was really rather to find also a good job. And to be proactive and creative and how and where to find something. I would have expected with the track record on my soft skills and everything given and this is something which I think recognizing what the person has delivered for the company because, yes I got money for having been in Brazil, but you also rearrange your entire life and this is something that the company could at least appreciate a bit more and show on the return as well.”

Researcher: “So a sense of appreciation from the home company was relatively low?”

Candidate B: “Yes.”

Researcher: “How was the relationship with your co-workers? Did you feel any appreciation there? I mean, with the colleagues that stayed in Germany for always. Did you feel any acceptance when you were coming back? Or appreciation? Nothing changed.”

Candidate: “Nothing changed actually. I mean, this would have been great, actually, if at least some of the learnings you always take from being or living abroad. If this is taking a well into the company but this I neither have not seen. So maybe it's also the combination of those different things where you really just think about some appreciation from company or colleagues whomever they could show. And you just say it, yeah but now it's like this.”

Researcher: “So when you are coming back, did you expect at least to apply your learning at some point?”

Candidate B: “Actually, I did and I do, because I have personally really developed very much due to the Brazilian culture. I have been quite a direct, straightforward person than before, and I learned a lot in Brazil on how to appreciate the entire person and really to bring everything

together so that people are not just an equipment at work, but they bring also their lives to work and that you really have to bring all these things across, this is something I have learned there and I appreciate it also that I have learned this and that's why this I have taken really into my daily life and also into my roles afterwards, because this is something where you can really bring much more human leadership to the people than I was aware of. I had shown to really to show also a bit more weaknesses as well and be more human and more human leader. This is something I have learned and I apply everyday. I have also applied today so everything fine.”

Researcher: “Let’s look a bit in to your motivation of going abroad. How did the opportunity arise and what was the most important factor for you to say, OK, I'm taking this opportunity?”

Candidate B: “You want honest answer, right? You get it. So first of all, I mean, from a from a professional point of view, I always wanted to move into commercial or sales. My boss did not have the chance to place me somewhere in another area in a commercial or sales role. And that's why, as he said, but honestly, if we do not manage this, then I will do something with you here within the supply chain. So at least I can really personally develop and bring myself. So that's why he decided or not decided but he proposed that he will try to find me an interesting role within his area of responsibility. Fortunately, he was responsible also in Latin America for the supply chain center there and that's why he arranged a few things so that I could drop in there and someone else had a chance to go to Germany on a certain job. From a personal point of view, I think it's even more interesting why we decided to go to Brazil because we had a very extensive travel to Mexico back in 2011, which was almost four weeks. And we travelled with a private guide to many, many different places there. And with this travel, we actually decided we have to go and see more places and locations in South America and so when the opportunity arose to go to Sao Paulo, we immediate said, yes go. So that's why it was a perfect fit from both. But to be very honest, I would never have

expected that the Latin American culture would have had such a good impact on me. Plus, what I found quite nice as well that when I arrived actually a colleague or a team member of mine said to me that actually you're more Brazilian than your predecessor, which I found quite cool. And I mean, this is also what I nowadays see, that I'm far more, as I've said with this human leadership of really having this rather human part of interaction as well as really rather on the emotional side than on the very conservative effect driven German side that it's not mine. But also with this, I feel that I'm much more successful also with leading my teams in Germany and the people appreciate this. So is not to be the way chemical industries in Germany always had been in the past. It's just a good mixture. I took a lot of learnings and I'm happy that I can apply them every day because I feel much better about this.”

Researcher: “Very good. OK. So am I mean, for you then it was a really good time in Brazil and that you appreciate all the things that you learned. A lot of people when they come back and have been feeling so good abroad, they might fall into a hole because they come back to their old environment when the old mindsets are in. How easy or difficult was it to adjust again in Germany then?”

Candidate B: “Not so easy. I have to say, because this was also for my husband's a first time being outside of Germany not for vacation, but for real life and coming back, you first realize all the things that also do not work in Germany. It was rather a combination of certain things that you just see so it was not only how people behaved at work and how streamlined or process driven they are, but it's also on how you interact in daily life with other people around you. Especially if you like the way Brazilians are then it is just the way where we are saying this is not what you see in Germany and I mean, I was always hugging and kissing everyone in Germany in the beginning until you notice, you have to stop this because people do not like it and misinterpret it as well. So it was quite this was really quite a difficulty for me as well, also from that angle, really losing that emotional end was

difficult for us as well. This is also what we still see why it was also a very good time for us in Brazil because we could really interact differently with people and we had a great life.”

Researcher: “And now with your experience of being abroad, coming back, facing these difficulties, would you go again having experienced all this?”

Candidate B: “Yes, and you want to know why?”

Researcher: “Yes, tell me.”

Candidate B: “Yes. It's actually also a rather private reason. But having two young kids is that we currently have them bilingual kindergarten as well. And what I really see or my husband and I really see is how much children can develop in an international environment. So any opportunity going abroad, we would take just also for the sake of the kids, because I think it's the best thing you can do for your kids to be really metropolitan and having a different mindset. And that's why I appreciate to work for a big group and maybe one day we have a chance again to go abroad so it's now it's less about me, I have to say but rather also about what is the overall circumstance to work for the family as well that I think it's quite cool.”

Interview Candidate C:

Researcher: “Welcome XY and thank you very much for your time to participate in this interview since I'm collecting various kind of interviews for my master's thesis. The topic of my master's thesis is repatriation. My goal is to find out the motives that Patriots have to stay with the company after they return from their international assignment. So studies show that a lot of repatriates after their international assignment leave the company and this often happens in the first one or two years. You can imagine it's a huge loss of investment at the end for the company because all the knowledge that the repatriate brings goes away with him. Expatriation is a very expensive process,

so it's not interesting for companies if repatriate come back and then leave, for example to the competitor. So in order to understand why they leave, why they stay and then to learn from the repatriates that stayed. Because I think this can help a lot of companies to develop a better strategy to retain this repatriates. For you, it is basically sharing a lot of experiences that you've had on your return. Could you kindly start with introducing yourself, especially into the regard where has your international assignment taken place? How long? Since when are you back? Have you been there with your family? All the overall international assignments career so to say.”

Candidate C: “I had several stays abroad. The first one was in Spain, in Barcelona. My job was to different hierarchies in XY company. Latest I was there, head of development of XY company and four or five years after they asked me to join the Chinese joint venture XY company was sharing in China. That was XY, located in Shanghai. Also as head of development there and the task that I had to do was to amplify the R&D department there. When I came, there was some 800 people, more or less. The capabilities of the people were not bad, but not enough for the task that we had to do in those years. Building up the largest joint venture in the world. So I joined there. I was there for nearly seven years. We created nearly the new R&D center there, we increased our staff, when I left, we were about 1800 people. We had to do a lot of investment also for R&D installations, proving grounds and so on and so on. This was very important because the growth in China for XY was based on building up, my time I think five new plants all over China with a lot of development, of cars, which are only developed specifically for China and different ranges. So that was my task there.”

Researcher: “Just to get some numbers right. When have you been in Spain? You said you have been there for five years.”

Candidate C: “I think it was until Two thousand, three or two. I'm not too sure. No, it's 27 years back. So, yes, I was six years in China, so I began there in 2004 or 2005.”

Researcher: “So you moved from Spain directly to the next international assignment?”

Candidate C: “That's right.”

Researcher: “So the headquarter is in Germany?”

Candidate C: “Yes in Germany. Well it is little bit different. XY is a company of several brands, and nearly all the brands, they have their own R&D center. But at least there is one head of group development in those days, who coordinated all the activities all over the world regarding R&D activities. So before I came to Spain, I was located at in Ingolstadt with XY. This was a little bit a round trip Ingolstdt, Barcelona, Shanghai and now back to Wolfsburg, where I began.”

Researcher: “What was your motivation to go abroad?”

Candidate C: “Well, at least it was one important step of my career, in XY there is a certain philosophy which at all times is of great importance. When I began, I was young, it was very important to do among other things an important job abroad and that was very interesting, that was challenging, at least because you have to live in different cultures, you have to do some new things which are normally not so well implemented as it is for example, in the headquarter in Wolfsburg or in Ingolstadt. So it's always a little bit of a challenge. That was for me, very, very interesting. I'm a little bit curious about other cultures, curious about other people, beginning something new, creating something new, which is not already settled up as the headquarters in Wolfsburg. For me, that was very interesting work and interesting jobs. And yes, that was a motivation. And one important step in the company and to grow to make your career to complete knowledge in different areas.”

Researcher: “Would you say that it was kind of planned in your career?”

Candidate C: “It was not an obligation but if you are not prepared to do that, then you will not proceed in your career. For me, that wasn't the main argument, the main argument for me was to experience something

new. New cultures, new people. Different levels of installations, different levels of at least capabilities in the companies and creating something which after a certain period of time is really something you can measure. You can see that it is something which is very satisfying. I mean, if you do a career in XY or if you have the opportunity to do a certain career in XY this is one important step. There are others, for example, also studying certain seminars and certain trainings or your capabilities and leading people, business questions and economy questions and so on. But at least it's also something like studying on the job, how to deal with different people, different cultures, different opportunities and at least in China, different societies and policies.”

Researcher: “Can you explain me from whom it was initiated to go abroad? Was it the company that approached you and said, do you want to go abroad or was there a lot of action from your side?”

Candidate C: “No, in my case, that was really initiated and the big momentum came out of the company. That's true. I already had a certain kind of career. I was responsible for a group of people in those times for fifteen people. That's already something important if you have to do that and then there was the need that someone had to go to Spain in order to create their a R&D center. And I was prepared to do so. I was several times in Spain, first time when I was very young, when I was 30 years old. I was there then after three years, they called me back and I had to over my old department when I left because my former chief, he retired and they needed someone who was capable to do that. And then I worked there for some years, for five or six years in this position. And then again, there was a crisis in XY and someone was needed to do some developments, some urgent developments. They asked me again and then I went there. And from that time on, I was again three or four years within XY. Then there was the need to go XY, they asked me to take over a very big area in Ingolstadt, of 1200 people there. and yes, I took over that and then I was there for three or four years again. Again they asked me because the head of

development in Spain didn't want to proceed because it was a very difficult time in Spain, a big crisis there. There was nothing, planned to do new concepts or new products and so on, it was really a little bit desert product wise, they asked me to go again and to take over the R&D center in Spain, so I did. It was a difficult time because it was just a period of time when in Spain, the crisis was really profound of all over Spain. and there was no demand, no one was buying cars. We had to do a really big effort to survive and to prepare the future, so we did. After five years, they asked me if I would be prepared to go to China, so I went to China. Big challenge, because China is very different from Europe. I went there to have a look and see Trip. That was for a little bit more than a week I had the opportunity to see what's going on there and what was the task and what was the challenge and what were the goals of the company that was such a huge single, such an interesting thing. At least I agreed to do so, yeah. I did it. After six years, they wanted me to stay, but then in a certain moment, you have to take a decision that has to be a good balance between your private interests, your private needs and company needs. And if I would have agreed to stay, then I would had to stay there more or less for again another three or four years. And I wasn't prepared to do that again, because after 10 years abroad, it's nearly impossible to go back because there's such huge change then in your mother company in the headquarter and it is very difficult to enter then again. I decided to go back and asked them to have a look. What would be the right time in order to get an interesting job. Because that was of course my goal to get, again, an interesting job. In parallel I had some other opportunities from headhunters. But then they got a job which I've done over the last three, four years here. That was also very exciting from the engineering point of view, doing, the new electric cars for XY. Being Head of technical development for that. And yes that was so interesting that I agreed to go back to work to the headquarter. So the motivation to go back was at least really the job itself, the challenge to do really brand new technology up from nothing, from a white sheet of paper, at least that was something

which was exciting that I liked it. I think it was the right decision. We had to build up new developments. We had to build up new organizations, a totally new technology, totally new organization, how to deal with suppliers and how to deal with the internal capacities and so on. Really difficult thing, that was why I at least stayed with the home company.”

Researcher: “OK. That is exactly where I went to go with the questions. So when you were still in China and the question came up, OK we would like to you to stay here. And you had to elaborate what do you want, you told your company, I want to go back, but I want to have a job that.... Could you maybe explain what criteria you wanted to have in this job or what expectations you had?”

Candidate C “At least the expectations more or less did fit, at least to what I was looking for. A very interesting job, a challenge. Something which is not the usual way to do developments at all with the same. Okay. There are always the new technologies you have to implement. But I wanted to do something really new and that was the reason I agreed to do so. So, I told them, OK. If I take over a job back in the headquarter it has to be on the right time and it has to be the right conditions. And they agreed and it was a little bit different period of time because it was just a period when there was the diesel crisis and all the top management who at least promoted me, they had left the company. New people rose and I had to discuss with them again how to proceed and so on, but at least I think it was a good decision to stay.”

Researcher: “Did you experience in this situation a lot of support from the company that was trying to give you the right job that you were looking for?”

Candidate C: “Yes. In XY its usually that you always have contact with your home, with your headquarter. The opportunity to talk also to the human resources department for further reasons, because you have to find new staff for your rising company... So, you're in constant contact

also with the Department of Human Resources, that's a big advantage. And at least people who leave the headquarter and go abroad, they are certain pool you have close contact to the company in order to help to create a little bit of a bond between both sides. I think that's important in other companies that's not the case because it's a question of policy and in XY the policy is like that. If I would send one of my guys abroad to China or to wherever it might be that then you have to discuss with the guy you are sending abroad, what is his perspective? So what is his job? And if everything fits well and he is doing a good job, what will be his next step in the company or what will be his position to re-enter the company and take over new responsibilities, usually higher responsibility. That is something that would be what is the company discussing with those people who nowadays go abroad Some there is the perspective from both sides. If those who go abroad do a good job then usually they come back and they take over new responsibility, higher responsibility and it's a step in their career, one step forward in their career. It is very transparent.”

Researcher: “So does it mean that the policy kind of stays that you already start discussing what happens on your repatriation. The moment that you leave you already start thinking about what will happen when you come back.”

Candidate C: “This is an important step of development in your career. Once you go away, once you decide to go away, to go abroad, to take over some kind of new position, that new responsibility it is usually also it's not a job you're familiar with. It's a development for you on one hand, on the other end of course to fill out the needs of the company, it is kind of a trunk contract. So, both sides are aware about what is the expectation, one to the other and I think that's the right policy to deal with people who are willing to go abroad and willing to do a job abroad. Very, triggered process, definitely. It is very important how the policy is designed. Sometimes when you come back to the original position is already occupied and they have to look for new

one. So that's normally a short period of time where you have to do some kind of project, but usually that's not a very long time. Usually it's like that that there's a planning behind and in 80 percent of the cases it works. But on the other hand, the higher you get into hierarchy, the more uncertain is your future. That's the environment of really top management. Not only that the higher you get more certain is your career and your position as it is a pyramid the jobs at the top are very limited. And then you have to see how to fit there. That's the limitation of quantity of jobs which are available. It's not only that you go back and then you will be a member of board of management or something like that. That is that is not the case. So the higher you get, the more uncertain it is then your repatriation or your position. It depends on a lot of criteria because every five years, six years, seven years there's a change of top management board member, board member management and so on. Then with different policies or with different ideas and with different priorities and then they are looking, of course, for their needs and for their new priorities, so that has to fit. And that's the case, in high management there's a certain uncertainty.”

Researcher: “Did you experience uncertainty? How high was your uncertainty level upon your return?”

Candidate C: “Yeah, of course. Because when you're in this position like that, for example, you are occupying like Shanghai, which was the most important R&D center outside of the headquarter. And when you come back, then you cannot expect to enter into the Board of management or on a board level because that will not happen. In my case, it was the diesel crisis that come up new people with totally different ideas and the company had to change from all over and there was nothing like before.

Researcher: So you said you experienced a relatively high uncertainty level. Do you think that it is important to, upon your return, to Keep your expectations low.

Candidate C:

That's important, because at least if you want to be successful, especially the road, then you need a certain bond to your company or between you to your company or your company to you. That is not the case if you would be sent out without *the OK*, go abroad do your job, come back and there is no relation, you are not measured whether if you reach the actual expectations of the company or not, then there is nothing, you are simply there. There is no bond, you are losing the relation between your headquarter, and that is very dangerous. It's very dangerous because a lot of people, which I knew which were abroad, it was the case that there was not really the relation and the bond between company and the expatriate. They sent them out, OK they do the job, they weren't aware about what is really the expectation of the company and in a lot of cases it was really unprofessional. They were sort out they don't know the position to cover and you will not know what to do, without defining the challenge, without defining milestones, without defining the real strategy about what to do and what to be achieved in that time, and that's very unprofessional for those who were in these positions because it's not something which is really a challenge, is something where you feel lost. Then a lot of people who change the company they can get the opportunity to go away easier.. For example when I was in Spain I was responsible for the design department and our chief designer, when he came back to the headquarter he was parked in a project after more or less half of a year or something like that, an they sent him over to another brand and he did a great job. But there was this period of time where there was a lot of trouble in XY, a lot of uncertainty and the environment was not very good. And then he got the opportunity on interests from the Korean side, from the competitor and he take over the position of head of design of XY and now he is head of design of the XY group. So his reason to lease the company was just like that, there was some kind of uncertainty, there was no communication, there was loss of relation within the group and he had a good opportunity to do the next step in his career. And that's everything you can achieve as a designer to be head of design

of the automotive OEM, That's nothing more And he took over this position. I met him some months ago and he is quite happy there, he is very international. He's Belgian. Lot of years abroad. They were in South Africa. He lived for several years in South Africa, too, and so on. So he is one of the guys who was an international guy, who likes to be in other cultures. He was working for XY, he was working for XY sometimes before. People like that they are familiarised doing jobs in other cultures and other countries and also under different and difficult conditions. He left the company and he had a certain chance to be chief of design of his home company. But he didn't want this uncertainty. And then there was the opportunity to do a huge step. He left the company and he went over to Korea and took over the position of the head of XY and head of a new brand, now he took over the position was of one of the most important designers of the car industry, which originally also from XY. Worked a lot of years and within XY. And there was also some kind of loss of bond between within the design group and he was also asked from the Korean side to take over the design of XY. He created all the products of the last 15 years for XY. So very, very successful. Again the headquarter had to give up one of the most talented designers and he's now working for the competitor, jumping all over the world, his reason to leave the company was just that. That there was a certain loss of relation, loss of bond, he felt that he wasn't supported like he's supposed to be supported, there was a certain kind of frustration and this frustration is always when people begin to think over the position and think over what you do and then he had the opportunity, as I told you and he took this opportunity and now he's happy.”

Researcher: “Very important two aspects you said. Relationship and bonds that you need to have with your company in order to feel motivated to stay with you and also for the company to retain this repatriates.”

Candidate C: “You need to trust on what you're doing is serving for something, if that is not there, if you're only there and a little bit lost and unbounded, no one likes that. Then people begin start to think over

the opportunities and the chances to looking for something new. The market is like it wasn't those times. There's a lot of demand for good people and they take over other possibilities.”

Researcher: “For the people that stayed with the company. How was the company able to maintain this relationship, this communication, this feeling of bond? What actions has the company taken? I don't know, monthly meetings for example?”

Candidate C: “That is very important. The bond is created in communication. So communication and an interchange of a dialogue about your work. About how far you have gone with your project. Is everything running well? There has to be communication. There has to be something you can rely on. If you can not rely on something than you're always in a position of I don't know what will happen and I don't feel safe about my future or everything, the effort I do, also with the family and with the kids ... If this is not worth to do that is when people begin to get doubts about their situation. And this has to be avoided. There always has to be a communication, need to be a discussion, you need to feel safe and you need to rely on what you are doing is worth it and when the work abroad ends you will not fall down and you will not get into a situation where you later on do not feel well, or lose a position. And in companies who loose the people, it is the reason why they lost their good people. People who are abroad they need to a feel that it's important what they're doing, at least for the company? That's not a joke. There has to be a dialogue about that. And that's important. You need to feel that your one important piece of the puzzle. And if that is not the case, then you will leave company for sure, there other possibilities or depending on how the economy is going, So that's the way people think.”

Researcher: “And lastly, to sum it up, your motivation to stay with your home company was...?”

Candidate C: “Yes, because I was part of the team. That's the important thing. I've always had a lot of contacts to my home base and to my bosses and

also to my colleagues. So the bond did not crack down. I was abroad, but I always had communications, contacts and discussions. And I felt that what we were doing outside was really an important puzzle. And indeed it was because in those days and today, again, China was financing for XYs growth. I felt I was part of the team, part of the strategy. I felt very well or comfortable, and that's why I didn't look to others. I had the opportunity I could have changed to others. You will not do that if you are fine, if you are comfortable in your situation. If not, then if there's a good offer you would change. Especially those people who are open minded, open to new cultures, open to new situations, to new challenges. They will change.”

Researcher: “Exactly. One last question in how did your company support you to maintain this communication with the headquarter while you were abroad.”

Candidate C: “In our case it was very special because during the new developments there were also in those days, some group test flights where we had to send over our cars all over the world. And during this test flight, you had the contact and dialog with the group, with all the managers, with board members, with your colleagues and so on. So there was a lot of communication, a lot of dialogue about what you are doing, which is what about the products. So that was not really a problem in my case.”

Interview Candidate D:

Researcher: “So first of all, thank you very much, XY for taking your time, even after such a long day and at the end sharing your experiences with me because my topic is repatriation. The objective is to find out the motives repatriates have to stay with the company after successfully completing their international assignments. So maybe you have heard that a lot of repatriates actually leave their company in the first one or three years and of course, this is a huge loss for the company and loss of investment and loss of knowledge. And I want understand the

motives that people have to stay with home company in order to help the companies to improve their strategy on retaining repatriates. So it's basically sharing your experiences. In this sense, could you just start with telling me a bit about you. Where have you been abroad. How long? How many times? Did your family go with you? An overall summary of yourself.”

Candidate D: “It's kind of funny that you're asking why did you stay with the company and not why you have left the company or why you haven't left the company? So you asked me in a positive manner. So actually, I have been with my family to China for roughly two years. That actually happened from 2011 to 2013, if I'm correct. Two years with my family staying in China and being V.P. of our Chinese subsidiary based in China. So that was actually my role there. And then in 2013, I migrated back to Germany where the headquarter is also located with the family. So we went there with the family and we also came back with the family.”

Researcher: “What was your motivation to go abroad?”

Candidate D: “It was kind of a mixture. So it was part of my career plan to go abroad. It's part of our internal career path strategy to send all the managers, at least for a couple of years to the outside world, to really get a sniff of different cultures, different organizations, smaller set ups and some of that is simply part of our routine strategy to develop managers within XY. That was the part let's say driven by the company. Then there was also a private motivation to go abroad. Kind of an adventure seeking, indeed. So trying to do something differently and also to join that specific part of the life with the family abroad. That was also something. So not only my personal thing, but also for the family to get a development thing for the family.”

Researcher: “How was the process? How did everything start when you went abroad? How well was it planned before? How was the communication from the company side?”

Candidate D: “Believe it or not. So although we are part of the DAX family, so one of the bigger companies in Germany, XY was one of the bigger companies in Germany but we didn't have an on boarding process. So there was no training supplied here in Germany before we went to China and there was also no on boarding program in China. So compared to other DAX, companies like, for example, Bayer or other companies like that, they have a real strategic on boarding process for the family members as well as for the workers. But that is something we haven't received. So it was really kind of a jump in the cold water. What happened prior to our venture to China was that I travelled over a period of 10 years, at least regularly to China before we went to China. So I had regular business trips, at least three, four or five times a year to China. So I knew a little bit about China and the culture and also the specifics there. And then we had it with my wife we had two look and see trips.”

Researcher: “When was it communicated to you that you will move abroad? How much time before you actually did the step?”

Candidate D: “It was actually more than two years, so I really had a very long period prior to our flights. But that was determined by myself. So originally it was planned only one-year information before flying. But I asked for two years because we had to settle some school issues with the kids and some other private stuff, so actually, I had a pretty long period to adjust myself and to plan it.”

Researcher: “How was the support from the company during this time, during preparation time before going abroad.”

Candidate D: “As I said, two years preparation times. That's why I said two years. So actually, during these two years preparation time, there was nearly no support. The only real support was, if you want to say so, to look and see trips. So they paid the two trips. And that was it, basically.”

Researcher: “Could describe your expectations related to your job abroad as well as to your general living adjustment abroad?”

Candidate D: “Good question. As I told you so I knew the country, I knew the business there due to my former business trips over a period of 10 years. I knew the surroundings. I knew the declines, the business issues. So that was all quite known to me. So that was no surprise. So business itself was, as expected, difficult, challenging, interesting. All this positive things, and I was quite aware of all the business related problems, which later on definitely also occurred. That was the business part of the life. The private part of the life was mixed, so there were some difficult issues with housings, with climate conditions, with food with all these nitty gritty problems you're always facing. But on the other hand, everybody enjoyed it. So we experience a negative part of the life as well as a positive part of our lives. And also now, in retrospect, we met some nice persons, people coming also from Germany working for German companies in Shanghai. Not only the parents, but also the kids were quite nice which we have met there.”

Researcher: “Would you say that you have been satisfied with the international assignment from the job side and from the personal?”

Candidate D: “Both, yes. If I should rate, I would definitely say that the benefits for the personal development. I would rate that much higher than the benefits for the business. For me, this personal part of the experience was much more much more valuable than for the business or for the career part of it.”

Researcher: “Why so?”

Candidate D: “Maybe that's part of my personal background, as I already told you I was quite acquainted with the local conditions there. That was not so new. I haven't learned that much in terms of business, in terms of private things I think I learned a lot. So we experienced a lot of new things, positive and negative things, and that gave me definitely some benefits.”

Researcher: “So you take out of it that your private, let's say a learning curve was higher than the professional side?”

- Candidate D: “Much steeper and the value was much higher for the private sector than for the business section.”
- Researcher: “So you already said that you have been there two years. After two years, it was sure that you were going to come back. Was it fixed from the beginning? When did the company prepare you that you will go back the two years are finishing. Can you explain the process of how it was to go back?”
- Candidate D: “It was not fixed for two years. It was planned for minimum two years. So there was always a chance to extend it from my side. So they were open to extend it by another year or another two years. Actually, there was a discussion after 18 months, so one and a half years. I have to make up my mind what is my preference to go back and join another role in my German part of the company or to stay longer and I freely decided to go back because I had the feeling that this is not the right point in time to make that back move. I feel very grateful that I had the chance to decide it deliberately. So if I want to go back. They didn't call me back.”
- Researcher: “When they asked you what you prefer, did they already had a fixed job position for you that you take over on your return?”
- Candidate D: “That was I mean kind of lucky situation at that point in time that new position become awakened. So it was quite clear that I'm a good nominee for that position. So that was simply a bit of luck that after 18 months, this position became free and I got the chance to take over that position so that was not planned. But that was, as I said, kind of lucky.”
- Researcher: “How did your position back in the home company differ from your position abroad? For example, in terms of responsibility?”
- Candidate D: “Ok, easy question. Being in Shanghai I was simply responsible for a certain market area within Shanghai so market area was mainland China was basically sales driven position in Shanghai with responsibility for mainland China and then coming back the position

in Germany, was a global position so that was market and sales board membership for a global responsibility. Same business as you want to say so but simply for a much bigger region, namely the world.”

Researcher: “Can you describe the expectations that you had regarding your position back in the home company?”

Candidate D: “I mean, it was a dramatic step for me. Significant step because I was levered up to board member. So from one moment to the other, I had a global responsibility and I was responsible then for 2000 people. In China it was only a 100 or a bit more than 100. So it was much bigger in responsibility much bigger and much more difficult in terms of making decisions, because it simply has much more weight if you decide some things in that board member level. But that was super excited. I mean, that is something everybody is somehow dreaming of, to become once a board member. And that was exactly that step.”

Researcher: “So you would say that nothing was planned that you would have this position and it was coming out of the situation that you would get a higher level in your new job?”

Candidate D: “I slightly tend to disagree a bit and the words here. It is a kind of a planned Career path. And it is also kind of a precondition, so once you want to be part of the board member level. You have to go abroad, so everybody who is now taking that adventure or that risk or that challenge to go abroad has somehow in the back of his mind that this is a precondition if you want to become a board member. So at least when you are dreaming sometimes during night times, you always have in the back of your mind that this is something you are doing because you want to fulfil the preconditions to become once a board member. So it is not so strange, but then it turns into reality and then you are saying, OK, this is exactly as I have dreamed it.”

Researcher: “Did you ever had a feeling of uncertainty that maybe this planned career path would not work out?”

Candidate D: “In our businesses and industry in general. You are never sure what will happen and also career development is something which is never fully determined. So if somebody is saying he is absolutely sure that after step A, step B will come and then step C, that is simply unrealistic and are not coping with reality. So, yes, there is a certain insecurity always when doing such an adventure, and that's why I was also never sure that this would be the outcome of the whole story of the whole expatriation but it was never really planned. Dreamed but not really planned.”

Researcher: “I understand that you have been satisfied with the position you got after expatriation.”

Candidate D: “Obviously. I mean, if you look to it now, in retrospect, you would also say this is perfect. Looks like perfectly planned, perfectly executed with an absolute happy end. That's how you would see it in a CV. Right? So if you would see it step by step, it looks like looks like painted. Certainly it is not always like that. So there's a lot of hiccups, a lot of ups and downs, a lot of pros and cons, but all in all, after all this long period, no, I would say everything worked out fine.”

Researcher: “OK. So on your return, how did the company support you in terms of family that had to come back?”

Candidate D: “So private part. There was nothing. There was nothing prepared. There was no homecoming party celebrated. No, there was no planned move for repatriates. No, there's nothing. But that's a bit interesting to me. I mean, you have maybe talked to other repatriates already, did you get to know if in other bigger companies there is a real repatriation scheme for people coming back?”

Researcher: “It's very poor. It's definitely the focus on expatriation. So when you go abroad, everything is planned in detail. And when you come back, the companies mostly assume you're coming back and you will find your way through because you already know your home company. What a lot of people said is that they're missing this support, I mean, to find the school again for their kids maybe. And all the

administrative topics where they don't get support upon their return. This is kind of challenge on top of the process that they have to find a job when they are back. Not always do the repatriates have a secure job upon their return. So in many cases, they had to go through a whole application process because they were often placed in kind of project roles that are, let's say, like a parking lot. We put you there until we find something else. And this is the moment, let's say, whether people start thinking, well, I mean, with all the experience that I have, maybe I go somewhere else.”

Candidate D: “So then I'm the lucky boy here. Actually, as I already told you there was no real expatriation plan or scheme prepared for us. There was also no repatriation scheme. But all in all, it worked out fine. So even without that help, with or without that support, without that planning, it worked out super.”

Researcher: “It worked out well also because you had a fixed position, right?”

Candidate D: “I didn't have a parked position that was simply ideal. There was not the situation that I had the chance to come back and go back in my old role. That was not possible because the old rule was blocked. So and that is definitely kind of an uncertainty that if your old role, your old position is not blocked by another by another colleague. There is no chance to go back to that stage. So there is a kind of an uncertainty always. But I was never afraid because I was always so brave. OK, there will be another position, there will be even a higher position waiting for me without really having planned it. Coming back to your question, well, I was super lucky that it performed that nicely in both ways, in both directions.”

Researcher: “Would you go abroad again?”

Candidate D: “It depends. That was not an answer. I know. Definitely, yes, definitely. So it certainly depends on all the preconditions and background conditions and all these kind of things but in general, my experience was all in all that positive for me, for myself, for family that I would do it in any case, again. On the other hand, there is no

chance for any repetition, so you cannot do it twice so it is another story. It is another adventure with another background. But as I said, since it was so positive, I would always try it again.”

Interview Candidate E:

Researcher: “Thank you very much, for joining this interview and taking your time to share your experiences since my topic is about repatriation. I’m trying to identify the motives that repatriates have to stay with the company after they have successfully finished their international assignment abroad. So I don’t know, maybe you have heard or you had colleagues that went through it, because statistics show that there are a lot of returnees, so repatriates, that leave the company after the first two years. Often they go to the competitor or at least find a job somewhere else. If you look this from a company point of view it is a huge loss of investment because the expatriation and international assignment is expensive. The knowledge that the repatriation brings goes with the repatriate once he leaves the company as well as many other different resources. So in order to help the companies to tackle this problem, I think it is also important to understand why at the end repatriate stay with the home company. What are their motives to stay and what learn from them? What is their commitment to stay? In order to start, I would suggest that you maybe introduce yourself by explaining who you are where you have been abroad. How long have you been there with your family? Since when are you back? Like the overall international assignment, your international career cycle maybe.”

Candidate E: “My name is XY, working for at that time when I was going abroad looking for XY. Now it’s a separation as the IPO became XY. I went abroad in 2012 and was asked by my former boss as a global product manager if I would be interested to move into the global headquarter to Shanghai. One year before the global headquarter, one business unit was established in Shanghai. I was always quite interested in it

and therefore I was able to get that opportunity working there in a global product management, specifically Global Supply Management. I was in Shanghai a total close to five years and leaving Shanghai, moving back to my home to Cologne in its end of 2016 for different reasons. One main reason was that our daughter was born and we thought about it as it relates to our individual family targets and the way of living. So we have thought about it going back to Germany might be for life or higher quality and better opportunity as well as being abroad for five years or something keeps the learning curve high and needs to be a change. So end of 2016 I was moving back. I had the chance moving back directly on a new position, which I took over the beginning of 2017 in procurement heading globally in the category of procurement, which I'm still leading now.”

Researcher: “What was your motivation to first go abroad?”

Candidate E: “The motivation to go abroad was because before I had an offer, after university, I had a trainee program in controlling and accounting. I was always interested in gaining and getting a lot of different experience and considering as well not the ultimate business function and experience in different functional business, as well as in terms of different culture, different environments, getting different aspects of the style, how you work. And so, yeah, there's an opportunity going abroad, to Asia, to China. This was definitely matching those criteria. Of course, as well it was the kind of mind-set in terms of career aspects because of individual development. It seems quite important, gaining experience and getting the opportunity for several steps in your Vita, that this is a position which is shown so it was already at that point of time. Of course from former days I know that XY had really development position in different countries which means that it was not a concrete function which you applied for. It was more a real development position for people going on a career path and let's say working abroad was a kind of key requirement as a qualification for it. That was at that point of time not the case anymore. So for me the key motivation was to gain experience in a different environment

and culture. Plus, of course, having the opportunity to go for a next step in my career.”

Researcher: “At the end you had a key position in Shanghai was not a development position.”

Candidate E: “It was a real functional position. So a defined position and there was a need of resource in Shanghai. It was a position to draw on management. I was leading a smaller team, which was another motivation to gain first experience in leadership, so where it was go ahead with a lot of different aspects which I was able to get to know.”

Researcher: “Well, of course. So having these motivations in mind, when the time started to go back, what have been your expectations regarding your new job?”

Candidate E. “I have to say that my expectation was pretty low right from the beginning because I've heard it already and I've started to get some exchange with colleagues in order to get a little bit of understanding about how it works. And one thing I've heard right from the beginning was that repatriation means not that you have directly a job guarantee, that you just call out of your new place abroad and then something that just said I want to go back and they immediately look for a job for you or everybody has you in mind. Because the biggest challenge is that you have high dynamics in organization, of course, you have your local manager abroad, and you have your home manager who normally takes care of you, but due to the fact that the home manager has just changed during that time often an organization is not aware of each and everybody, so once you left, you're out of the minds. So repatriation is not for free. So it does not mean you take the decision to go back and immediately they find a job for you and that they are like, ah yes welcome XY, so we are waiting for you here. That was not the kind of mentality. But I was aware already before. So it was not something like going into a kind of disappointment in order to say, hey, what's happening now? On the other hand, it was a kind of I would not call it frustration, but in terms of comparison of people

who show flexibility in order to go abroad and then people who just stay in their existing job which have that kind of defending mentality. They were sometimes treated, I would not say much more positive, but they had their existing job, there was no topic which they needed to fight for and those people who were going to be repatriated take really a certain effort, which was at the end of the day, fine for me. I was running successful, but I was really taking in, let's say, an internal application process with all interview sessions and everything related to it which means that I was a normal candidate in order to show interest and to go smoothly over an application process again, in order to find the job back in Germany. And that was quite important for me because I had always a high motivation and I think that is one of the biggest challenges, because you are needed. You go to a specific job abroad you have a kind of career development, I would say not working, but it's really was a high, dynamic, intensive work you take a lot of commitment, not just only by your own, but especially with the related family members, because as I just always said that going abroad with the existing was the same colleagues as before in an environment from the company perspective, which is something like known having a job from the morning to the late afternoon is something which is not that big change, but especially for the Family members say as a spouse, which accompanied you it is a huge and big step because normally it terminates their job. They just accompany you and for them, it's something like sitting first in a completely foreign country to say, hey, what's my task, what is my vision and how I can realize something like that. And I think one mind-set of people are not going on and on an expat or have not that kind of development always feel and always indicate, well, expatriates it's a wonderful job. They got a lot of money. They are in a great environment and working only a little bit and everybody's happy. But the key criteria for an expatriate is completely different from my perspective and that is something steadily for going back. It is a kind of challenge because you have the feeling that you took a lot of effort in order to go abroad and then you have to take a lot of

effort again in order to go back. And that is not the financial aspect. It's not something like how is the overall repatriation organized. It was somewhat working because there are always some challenges in terms of whatever could happen. I think it's overall the psychological aspect for the people. They are going on the kind of parking lot. I think for most of those people who were going abroad have a career development, a clear pass for a career, as well as some expectations for their career and a kind of motivations that they go for those steps and it felt quite strange if you had that high responsibility this high workloads and high commitment while being abroad and then somehow having the feeling that the organization forgot about you and there is no concrete job anymore. Luckily, I was able not going into that experience because I was able to apply for a job and I was able to get a job which gave me the opportunity to go back again for a concrete job. And that was something that psychologically for me was very important, because I thought about it a lot. If I'm going back and I'm just sitting there in a kind of parking lot, in a kind of project position that would be different. I would say in XY, you are completely covered in terms of salary and everything is fine, but let's see that this is not the motivation. Because at the end of the day, I want to do a great job. I want to contribute to something. I want to have concrete position. And then, well, something which I took as the criteria for once I would move back. That there is the need to find something perfect.”

Researcher: “When exactly did you start to look for a job?”

Candidate E: “Let's say it was a kind of loose approach, I would call it. 1 ½ year ago in terms of the normal development dialogues with my former supervisor in order to say, hey, there is an idea about going back because it is becoming the 4th year and in order to go back to check if a position is open. Perhaps to change with each of it sector, or a concrete need it might be happen on a short notice or we need to take more action, a personal action and contribution. So 1 ½ year I would say we were addressing it more often between me and my supervisor

and he was addressing it into the leadership team. I was not looking actively for a position in Germany, but I was, let's say, a little bit more aware about it, but not an active search. Then 1 year, because something like psychologically this calendar year. There was an opportunity to say, okay, now we need to get more concrete. And then I've started to kind of bring myself back into their minds. So be more present again in Germany. So I took a chance during business trips in Germany in order to meet with different senior managers in different functions in order to introduce myself and to address my interests and that I would like to go back and if there is a position they should perhaps consider me in any kind of interviews or give me a call that the position is getting vacant. That was one year ago I think. Very concrete, the interview session was something like three to four months before we left. But now we get the kind of sequence because, of course, the decision to leave at that time was related to the concrete position. And when are we able to realize it. I would say it's a process, of one and a half to two years, really looking for a kind of job independently of the exact repatriation process. That's a different animal. The biggest issue, is the psychological gap in terms of highly motivated needed person taking a huge commitment in order to go abroad and something like nobody really takes care or is aware about that you want to go back. And that is something which needs to be relayed because a lot of other colleagues do not expect that they have to go into a kind of competition in terms of interviews to fight for a job back in Germany. But if you do not do so, at least what was my experience, you were just put on a parking lot or you have a huge luck in order that there is something coming up immediately and you don't need to apply for it. For me, the application, interview competition with others was not an issue. So therefore, I was taking it as a given in order to say, can I show my profile, let's say my profile and my qualification and put myself into hat roster for that application. But for others, it was something like, hey, I took this huge commitment in order to go abroad, so you need to find something for me.”

Researcher: “And that does not work at all?”

Candidate E: “And that does not work at all. Because the biggest challenge is really that the organization keeps on developing as well as you have changes in terms of different position. I would always say an organization has no memory. There's something written down in a kind of paper contract, expatriate contract. It's something written down that your last home manager who took the decision as well, that you go abroad is aware about it but that is immediately gone more or less once you left. Once you're not there anymore going to the canteen exchange was colleagues or so on, they are in their daily business and all others as well. So the organization has no memory about you or every day think about you, ah you want to go back once, so we need to look for it and we need to take care about it and so on. And that felt sometimes strange because, you know, you go abroad and you always have in mind to say, hey, it's for a certain period of time and then you go back but there is not a kind of welcome philosophy, the organization is not there standing ovation and say you are back lets welcome you at the airport or let's look for a position already and the office is already taken you just need to move in and everything is fine. I felt repatriation is somehow more challenging as expatriation itself. Because normally if you go abroad there is something completely new and you are asked for to go abroad based on a concrete position so you prepare yourself as well as this training for a foreign culture and all of that stuff happens. So you have an exchange with your partner, you think about it to say we go to China. What does it mean? You prepare a little bit. And your expectation is somehow prepared for it. Going back felt a little bit you are just coming home. So you don't need really to prepare for it. But five years change completely your mind. I think there is something which you have a similar experience as well as in private life going there in a pub or going to a restaurant. There are these kinds of fancy, strange stuff in a huge city like Shanghai, which is difficult just to exchange with your friends at home and your family or colleagues in order to

say, hey, what kind of working style was there. What happened? So going home was somehow psychologically a huge challenge because we had really to learn again how to behave properly from a private as from a professional point of view. And there there's nothing right. Because all HR system or tools, all kind of support is just related to the fact that you go abroad, but not that you're going back, because that is a gift. You are a German and you are born here, you have experience here, so once we're going back, it's back to your normal life. But that's not the case. If you ask me, the really biggest challenges, I would say is a psychological effect in terms of that, you're not really be prepared anymore because five years changed completely yourself or all the family members that accompanied. I would not say a shock because that's really extreme, but I would say it's definitely a challenge right from the beginning for each and everybody that is related to the professional life as well as to the private life. And from a professional point of view, especially there for me, it was somehow to say, OK, you have that memory to the time abroad and then you go back and say, well, it's somehow that they were not looking for you. Some of them ask you oh you're already back or say where have you been the last year? So some of them are really not aware of it and it felt really sometimes strange. And that is something which is a conflict for your expectation as well as for your career paths in order to say, hey, I was going abroad, giving a commitment to the company with all these challenges which happened. A big contribution in a kind of leading role, responsibility that I've taken during going abroad. And once I'm going back, sorry for the wording, but I felt a little bit like this parking lot piece of shit mentality. So why is it not honoured or appreciate that value which I have created. I don't want to have more money or I don't want to it whatever a company car or everything which is related to it because the financial aspect is not the key. It is really the appreciation of the company, that people who show flexibility going abroad, are sometimes not valued, especially not valued on a similar level as people that just stay at home. I think that was a huge discussion which

I started as well to say how could it be that people are not showing any flexibility and just stay at home defending their job and want everything as it is and people show flexibility in going abroad that they found some disadvantages of going back home.”

Researcher: “How do you think can a company take away this feeling of non welcoming related to the repatriates? I mean, you put your expectations low and had kind of your coping strategies on how to integrate again and you were aware of a lot of things, but maybe especially these repatriates that decide to leave the company, you are not able to apply these coping strategies. What do you think from a company point of view what can they do to handle this?”

Candidate E: “Good question. What's coming up in my mind are two aspects. One is in terms of expectations that really all repatriates need to be prepared from the expectation point of view right from the beginning in order to say, well, you going abroad on a concrete position, that is something which is now. Once you will go back, there is not a position for you automatically available. There is starting a kind of interview application process for the position, and that is something which you need to be aware of. I think that is a very important element because than people can manage that kind of expectation right from the beginning and it is part of the deal to go as an expatriate. The other aspect is because taking the fact into account, that the home manager definitely will change during that time. In most cases, and if you feel that you don't have the real pillar kind of look or orientation at home anymore, it would be interesting to somehow come up with the HR in the organization to say, hey, we have regular meetings from the home country with a dedicated HR person. Regular call every quarter, every half a year, meeting together with the HR home manager and the related expatriates in order to discuss certain aspects what could happen. That can be done as well as not only in a bilateral meetings or one to one, it can be taken in a kind of group meetings to say let's have a regular exchange, especially focusing on those things such as repatriation in order to

starting the discussion already and providing the feeling that somebody is taking care of you during the expatriation time itself. And I think that would cover as well that you have a kind of contact, doesn't matter if that contact changed, but you have kind of a home manager HR function taken care of expatriates and taken care of an exchange for certain aspects, especially in focus on repatriation.”

Researcher: “This means that in your company there is an age HR department, but not specifically lack of global mobility, part that takes care of all those topics? I mean, you're right, you are talking about one specific person, that you have and that is not a mentor, but like a manager that you can relate to while you are abroad. Does it also mean that your company right now did not have like HR department that is specifically organising all this?”

Candidate E: “We have an HR department with mobility aspects, but the HR department only focus on I would say all the admin related parts, so the process itself. So something like moving back, what kind of documents are required to be managed. How to take care that you can work again in Germany and then with different agencies of moving and so on. All these things are organised. So for example, when I said, well I'm looking for a job because I don't want to go on a project position, than it was more or less the business partner in China as well who was supporting me with my supervisor. It was not at all HR in Germany who really takes of those kind of aspects into account because in order to say key important is to go back or the company position, because I think psychologically that supports a lot. Nobody would leave the company if they really feel I am needed, I go a logical step in my career. That can be a lateral move as well. It's not always needed to go for a higher level, but I think the minimum expectations should be somehow that everybody has a kind of lateral move on the concrete position and therefore the HR Home manager could support and work on it, not to find a concrete job and to do everything for that person, because I think application interview, put yourself into that competition is fine and based on that expectation right from the

beginning. But having HR function to talk about really those topics. Because a development dialogue is mainly take only with the host manager and at the end you discuss with the HR partner in the host country. But there is nothing taken into account with the home company. Perhaps you can set up a kind of HR partner who takes care about it who starts to discuss about it. Once you share the interest based on the development and I want to go back in the next one or two years that the HR home manager is getting involved in order to start a discussion about what kind of interest you have in which function you want to go and shall I Initiate or start kind of network that we have those home managers coming back. I would say that at this point of time it's not a structured approach which we have. It is more or less an individual opportunity alignment and then of course, could lead to the fact that something could be happen with a lot of own initiative, which is fine. I don't want to take your own initiative out, but I would say little bit more needed structured approach as well as managed form HR to think about okay we have those whatever 50 expatriates abroad, they need to go back once and we will have some community meetings with them in order to discuss about repatriation aspects and that could start right from the beginning in order to feel always, wow, they really take care about it. It's always the feeling about expatriation is something that's a focus and how it's organized and repatriation is completely gone. Or it's an automatism because we moved them out so they will automatically come back. Done. But I think based on your statistics as well, that's not the case and a lot of people felt a little bit well, I'm forgotten or I'm not valued as I thought it should be valued. Of course, for other companies, if you really show than this flexibility as well as see experience in terms of management function, whatever is taken, for them it is something like, well, let's take those great profiles and we don't need to spend that money for sending them abroad. And if the existing company is not taking it serious, perfect for us. Once I did my apprenticeship in in a famous coffee company in Germany they had really a great apprenticeship program. So it felt really like what a great time. So the

2 ½ year apprenticeship program was perfect. They take care. They have programs they work on certain things. After that, they completely forgot about the candidates. OK, we need to find a kind of function for them because they are highly skilled people. We took a lot of effort into their education. And normally, these great resources, we want to keep it as a company, but they have no process in order to manage it afterwards. So for example, in my class, 100% of great people left the company immediately afterwards. And for other companies, it's perfect because they don't need to spend into the apprenticeship program, they just can wait and say, hey, let's get this great educated and trained people out of it. And I would keep it a little bit similar. So expatriation and repatriation process needs to be a holistic process in order to take it in all faces and a similar value for it.”

Researcher: “Very good. This is actually what it says also in literature and all the studies that have been conducted that there has to be a cycle that already starts with the expatriation and that you have to take into consideration the repatriation process right in the beginning, at the moment that you leave, because you're just for a period of time abroad. And if you want to have the person back, you have to think it right away. Exactly. So on all the aspect, that's your thought, how did the adjustment process go back to the home country in terms of your family?”

Candidate E: “It was similar experiences as going abroad already because, I would say the company tried with monetary compensation to manage family members. So because a key focus is always on the people working for the company and going abroad. So the family member's interests would you base feelings something like this is not important. Nobody thinks about that is something which everybody needs to deal with themselves. This is only one which is taking into account is in order to have different fees or whatever, in order to compensate some costs towards family members. But overall, I think they're kept completely alone and you need to manage it within that family to take care of

that. But when there are let's say tension or feelings and expectations these are not considered at all in the overall process. Neither as well as not going back, nobody asking "was it possible that your wife was able to get a job once you are back to your own country, or to say what is your wife now doing?" It is something like a normal process. There was a decision to go abroad and the spouse will accompany you. So for the partner it is a perfect life, they can drink some champagne every day, they don't need work, they have a lot of money and they can enjoy life and then go back. But that is not the case. And I think it is something which is the biggest issues because it's not related to any compensation fees. It's not related to the monetary aspects in order to feel comfortable. It's really related to the company that takes it serious and takes care about certain things and it's starting with an easy piece in order have in their process a kind of questionnaire as well as to say I have an interview with the partner as well. To see if the partner likes it in order to check what is your motivation? Is everything working well? Are there certain scenes which can be perhaps done or taken care about by the company? That's completely ignored. And of course, then it comes together because you go as a family most likely, and you take a lot of effort into account, especially as the spouse accompanied you. And I think in order to value the overall aspects, it is somehow needed to consider it in HR as well that they should have on their checklist, not only the person in the company goes abroad and repatriated as well but the entire family does and perhaps take something into account that there is a feeling of careness, which means not that the company needs to find a job for the spouse or whatever to spend more money. It's really, I would say, appreciation and the kind of careness for the people related to it."

Researcher: "So kind of similar motives as you when you were coming back to the home company, having this feeling of appreciation of being valued, everything that you have learned abroad, that you can apply it and kind of a well coming."

Candidate E: “And that it is prepared. Because if there is a feeling of they have no clue about it of the repatriation process. It was never mentioned before and now the whole organization is shocked and surprised about it that somebody wants to go back. And I think that leads to a kind of frustration. So it is really this low spending, low effort but small action elements which would create huge value for the expatriate repatriation process. It is something like careness in order to say, okay XY, we have on our documentation that you went abroad with your wife and your daughter is born, so within the first half a year during repatriation, we would like to have different calls with you as well as with your wife in order to check the situation, what's going on. Are there any elements in which we can support you or your wife? Is it something like that your wife found a job already again? Or what are your targets and how does it look like? So it's a small call, I would call it but it would have a huge, huge benefit.”

Researcher: “On all this experience that you had abroad and coming back, would you go abroad again? How is your mind-set regarding this?”

Candidate E: “So overall, we got a lot of positive experience for myself as well as for my wife, so for the entire family because overall everything was a great experience during that time. For my inspiration and career development, it was a great step during that time, as well as the effort to find a job afterwards it was somehow really terms of career development to continue on that. And I really can utilize the experience from abroad now in my job. So for us, it was a huge value going abroad and overall, those administrative topics that some other elements we were able to manage it. But it is a challenge in the family itself because I would say if the time of expatriation, repatriation, would lead to the fact, for example, my wife and I would go different ways, separate ways, or some other impacts happen that would be something which I would say, well, I would not take that effort for going abroad in order to destroy the family. But for us it was more or less after that first half year, I would say quite challenging in terms of what speed is a sense of life and what especially my wife wants to

do. It was than going in order to go closer together and really to work as a family as well as a couple. And it was something like which were let's say we are much closer now based on all of that experience, which the game was quite important for me. So I think it's not the salary or the benefits or what you are going to be able to get out of it. It's really the experience, the perspective, the career aspects as well as what kind of targets you have with your family based on that we had a lot of positive experiences that in general we would go abroad again. But it's part of the expectation because now, based on that experience we really would consider as well where to go, because we definitely first of all, we wouldn't go again to China, not because we don't like that life, but we cannot repeat that life, which we had there. So therefore, it's not an option for us again. And there are definitely a lot of other countries which we would go. But as well as countries which we would not go because we said, well, overall the quality of life is not that fine and we don't want to be in a golden cage because it is really the friend's environment, the relationships and everything which is built on and not any kind of compensation than having a huge load of money or whatever. And I'm now aware what it means in terms of repatriation at that point of time. I know that I have to go for applications and interview sessions, it's a kind of challenge but I have seen that it is able to do so and I'm not too afraid about to take myself again into a kind of competition.”

Interview Candidate F:

Researcher: “So the goal of my master's thesis is to find out the motives that repatriates have to stay with the company after their return. So there are a lot of studies that say that a lot of repatriates, they decide to quit after one or two years and go to the competitor, well there are many reasons why they leave the company. And in the end, from a company point of view, this is a issue because they made a huge investment to send the person abroad. Then they come back and they leave, then leave with the knowledge they have from the other markets abroad.

A lot of negative sides that a company has and also for the repatriate can be negative or positive. So due to the fact that there are already a lot of studies that aim to try to find out why repatriates leave. I want to see the side, why they stay in order to learn from them, to try to match it. So first, to start I would appreciate if you could introduce yourself, also tell me about your job position, about when you went to abroad, where you went abroad with your family or without. The whole package so to say.”

Candidate F: “Yeah, sure. OK. I am XY today, 56 years old, engineer by education, electronics engineer, worked in projects for the first dozen or so years. Automotive industry changed into software sales in the year 2001. Different positions, various size of companies, start-ups, international start-ups, mid-sized German company, large American corporations. So different steps, finally ended up with XX company, a very typical founder, German mid-sized company, software engineering software. I was holding a sales position in key account when I joined the company. So was key account manager for one of their three core industry segments. That was power distribution and power generation. So selling software to companies to generate and distribute power. So that's in in Germany it would be the Big Four. I volunteered for developing a very, very small organization to people in North America into a full blown sales organization. So after three years in key account with XX company to learn the product, learn the industry, learn the company, I then volunteered to go abroad, which was happily accepted by my boss at that point in time. I was reporting to the V.P. of sales and marketing, one of two VPs on the operational level for the company. So XY was only the owner as a CEO. My job in North America was to develop and establish a sales organization. So I had full PNL responsibility. I had full legal responsibility in terms of establishing the right level of employment contracts, making sure that the infrastructure of supporting functions is available. We decided to pull in accounting from outside services into the company. I hired sales people, both sales and technical support people for the

technical sales side, making sure that company directions, company strategy and tools and processes were implemented in a proper way and adapted to the North American market. So I was responsible for that for three years. Due to the nature of business in North America or the difference in nature of business, we didn't get to the point to break even with a larger organization. You need to know that people that companies in the software industry, they need to have a strong foundation of existing customers, well-paying annual maintenance fees. So a software company typically is living off of maintenance customers, 50 50. So 50 percent is existing customers paying annual maintenance on what they purchased years ago. And the other 50 percent is new business. So if you start from scratch, there is not a big deal of existing customers. And if you grow your organization to five, six or seven people, there's a lot of cost, you have to pay royalties to the headquarters, but you don't basically have the ground, the foundation of existing business. So not being able to break even easily. We decided to keep me as a V.P. of sales and also CFO for the North American division, keep me in place even though I returned to Europe. So I basically kept my position. My my sales director locally was appointed office manager. So I had limited signature power to be operational over there, but I stayed in my position. So my my stay in North America was from 2013 to 2016. And on my return, I got appointed to become a sales manager for all the subsidiaries outside of the DACH market. So having been the kind of a general manager slash sales manager for North America for three years. That was the right learning to then take over responsibility and that all of the eight subsidiaries reporting to me plus myself, basically still taking care of North America. So benefit for me was to grow into a totally new position. Having general manager responsibility abroad and on my return, having all of the general managers of the other international subsidiaries except the DACH market reporting to me. So I was then in charge of managing all the other general managers and the key point was most of those subsidiaries were again making losses, they were negative and the moment main objective was

managing the general managers in a way that we became profitable with all those in series. So that was that was a great step forward for me, both in terms of responsibility and in terms of reward, growing from managing one subsidiary into managing nine, including my own.”

Researcher: “You said that to go abroad was you kind of volunteered. So it was not directly that the company asked you to go abroad. What was your motivation behind it to say, I want to go abroad?”

Candidate F: “I have a huge affection for international business. So I, I love international business cultures, different business cultures. I love learning to perform, manage, cope with different business cultures. I just love the opportunity. I was in in the US for business for half a year in a very early stage of my career in 1995. I hugely enjoyed my stay. And I consider North America being an environment very well manageable for the rest of the family. So it was one of the rare chances if you look at it in the mid of 2010 and 2013, in those days, there aren't many companies where you still have a chance to go to North America. There is existing business. People usually don't see a need for someone to go over to North America. Go to China, yes Go to, I don't know, South America, Yes. But North America. Why? So that was a huge opportunity for me to make that step career wise but at the same time, feel comfortable about family to cope with all the circumstances, boys going to school. Wife coping job wise and so on. Which would have been drastically different in any other area I would say.”

Researcher: “OK, so this means that you went with your family, with your wife and with your two children?”

Candidate F “Yes I relocated family. My role of C level CFO in North America, allowed for a visa category that my wife was also able to get at work permission, and that was a perfect combination to have family relocate.”

Researcher: “What do you think are the let's say three most important aspects in repatriation.”

Candidate F: “First of this is typical German mid-sized company. So there isn't a separate HR department in the first place. There is no huge planning. It all goes through the two VPs at that point in time, who were responsible, one was responsible for sales and marketing, and the other one was responsible for product management, R&D and technical sales support and post sales support. And so that wasn't a long- term planning of sending people abroad in the first place and then having a clear career path upon their return. It was really it was really down to. OK. Now the guy's back. What is my biggest need in terms of which open roal do I want that person to fill? But that wasn't a long term plan. That was something that came up while I was discussing with my boss to prepare for the return.”

Researcher: “Did you encounter any of these concerns that maybe you don't know which kind of role you're going to have when you come back when you're leaving?”

Candidate F: “No, I had a great personal relationship to my boss, which made me feel safe on my leave. And I was very positively thinking about my return. So I basically just put it into the back of my mind. I didn't really bother much. I was I was trying to cope with going there and everything. It meant we compared to large organizations where you have strong either inside HR support for expats or you have large services supporting you, including tax and everything. I basically had to do everything on my own on my way out. So there wasn't much room for worrying about what happens in three years. But I'm coming back and to be honest with a with a German a mid-sized company, pretty much just rolling up sleeves and seeing what's next. This would have been three years, would have been too far, far ahead. Planning for that type of company.”

Researcher: “So what kind of expectations did you have when you were coming back? You said you were very confident when you left to the US

because you had a good relationship, so you're expecting that your same boss was trying to arrange your good position or a similar position that you had abroad, was it communicated earlier that you're going to maybe have a better position than the one you had abroad. So how would you describe your expectations in this regard?"

Candidate F: "So there wasn't a strong discussion, but around about half a year prior to return, we started to look into what could be a good position for me to return. And we discussed various options for me, and that was kind of a coincidence. So I returned summer 2016. So we started talking about brought about change from 2015 to 16 around about year end of the fiscal year with that company starting in April. So that was a good timing, pretty much so we could start preparing the ground, announcing change in organization with the new fiscal year and having kind of still a gap phase from April to summer before I really was physically back in Europe. I was expecting to have my learnings, my achievements, my development, being honoured in a new position. So there was a clear expectation from my end about that I will be offered a role, which is considering the amount of learning, the amount of expectation of knowledge that I gained, especially in the context of international business, which is always a very sensitive piece of the cake in mid-sized German companies. So you're always to have this kind of there's the German headquarter mentality. We know everything. We grew the company. There's only idiots out there in the rest of the world, and they never get it. And no matter how much we explain, no matter how well we support, they just don't get it. So you have this kind of friction between headquarter doesn't understand how difficult it is to be remote and be in very small organizations, feel on your own and try and survive somehow. And on the other hand the other doesn't get it why they are not more successful and why they can't just replicate the success that there is in the home grown market. And I was expecting to help, bridge that kind of gap. This was exactly what I felt was a main topic of my business already in North America. So being the advocate for the

North American organization in Europe with headquarters, and it was natural to me that taking the same but with multiple sites, with multiple businesses out there was a natural step. But it took a while. It took some discussion between my boss and I before we came up with the right set up of the organization.”

Researcher: “But you said that this was happening or started the discussion started half a year before you returned. And at the end, would you say that your expectations have been met, that you at the end had a position where you were able to apply all your learning?”

Candidate F: “Yeah, definitely so. So it wasn't a plan right from the beginning. But once we started discussing towards the end of my assignment, we discussed various roles, various opportunities. We also played about some of those opportunities. But we finally decided to have me become head of the international business outside of the DACH market, which is the smaller portion of the business, of course, being a strong German company. And that worked out fantastic. And that was fully meeting my expectations. And ironically, just to underline that when my boss left the company some time later and the overall organization for sales changed, the setup changed from a territory organization to a an industry sector organization, which made me lose my general manager management responsibility. So and that basically let me decide that I wanted to leave the company. So I would have stayed way beyond the three years after my return. I could have pictured me retire in that company. But since they changed organization away from exactly that responsibility, which made huge sense to me, which was very successful and which was honoured by those general managers exactly for those reasons that I was the perfect bridge between being those abroad, being remote at headquarters. That responsibility has been taken away from me and that made me decide to leave the company.”

Researcher: “OK. Do you believe that having the right role on your return is one important aspect that motivates you to stay with the company?”

Candidate F: “It is the only reason for staying. Absolutely. So you go out, you learn something. You perform. And then you want to apply whatever you learned there to your new job. And if that can be the case, if they allow you to do so, in my case, do exactly that on a broad scale, that is perfect. I mean, there is no there is no better way.”

Researcher: “And do you felt any appreciation from inside of your company that your company was understanding that you need this position where you were able to apply all the things that you learned? Or was the company rather going to a direction saying, well, we just tried to fit? You're somewhere here?”

Candidate F: “Tough to say. I must admit, I'm not sure how to answer that. I do understand the question, but I'm not sure what the true motivation was for anyone else except my boss. So my boss wanted to leverage my knowledge and he saw the needs and he saw a good fit. So we agreed on my job. I have no idea what about the other V.P., if he would have if he bought into the same thought process or if he just said, OK, it is his area of responsibility and whatever he decides, OK, I've got to be fine with it. Same with the CEO, with the boss of the two. Not sure. I always felt backed up by both. So don't get me wrong. I don't know if they had a strong opinion about the need for a properly placed meeting on my return, except of my boss. And again, I wouldn't I wouldn't see that as one of those side effects of being of a small mid-sized German company with very much hands on and short term planning. I wouldn't say risky business, but very short term planning. And they don't have a long term HR our development plan in general. They just they just see business needs. They want to react to business needs. They fill positions and the rest done because it has to be done.”

Researcher: “So I think you mentioned it already a bit, but what would have been a very critical aspect that made you want to leave the company?”

Candidate F: “It happened to be three years from nine years total. And it surely happened because of a significant change in organizations. And it

was more politics and management than any other reason. So my boss left the remaining V.P. decided to take the full responsibility instead of having the V.P. who left being replaced. He didn't have a real sales background. So the two sales managers in place at that point in time were reporting to him. From our perspective, from my colleagues and my perspective, there wouldn't have been a need to mistrust us. But he didn't really he didn't really know what we were talking about or he didn't trust, fully trust what we were talking about. So instead, he wanted to put one of his one of his base to put in into charge within sales, which meant growing the sales management for two to three, which naturally means you cut some of the responsibility of the existing two to limit their responsibilities, limit their business volume just to allow for a third person to take a step up on the same level. It even happened to be the case that by turning from a territory oriented, so DACH market for my colleague and rest of world for me, turning back into a Matrix organization with three sales managers taking care of the three industry segments across the world for everyone. It happens to be in a way that the new sales manager got in charge of the most promising business segment overall. So not only that, you cut down responsibility for the existing two, but you basically give the nicest piece of the cake, the biggest and nicest piece of cake to the one who is now basically, as we say, over overtaking to the right. So it would have been obvious that maybe in a year later he would have become the overall sales manager and we would have to report it to him and so on. So that was a losing responsibility, which wasn't and in my case, it was losing the management role for the general managers in different regions, which I think is critical in very small organizations. So I questioned the decision taken in both ways from a sales management perspective. I had to take basically a downsize in my responsibility. But I also questioned it being not very sensitive for a small organization. It is not leading to better results. I was very much questioning the decision, everything that kept me happy initially on my return was taken away. And so there wasn't any reason for me to stay. Now, if we go back to the point of return, first of all,

I would have expected to have a job which is bigger than from a responsibility point of view, bigger than what I had locally and what I had before that was fully OK and that was a given. So that was nice. In my case, it was an ideal match initially. So having responsibility for one subsidiary and then growing that into all is a perfect growth in and a natural step in your career. Once that was taken away, there wasn't much point in the state.”

Researcher: “Yeah. OK, perfect. You already said that your company didn't give you much support when you left to the US and when you came back in which situations you got support and how was it organized to leave and how did it differ from coming back?”

Candidate F: “It was it was, again, very, very hands on both ways. So it was really me doing a lot of investigation and figuring out. I basically stumble across a local relocation service. It was my decision to move the existing company side from Chicago to Detroit because they were private German schools in Detroit where one key criteria were met for the boys to take German and second foreign language classes outside of the regular middle and high school business. But all that which was crucial was basically me finding it out myself. Regulations like if company wouldn't continue to pay kind of a minimum status fee into my German health insurance, if I wouldn't have found out myself, I would have basically lost the right to be in standard health insurance in Germany. So on my return, I would have had to insure family on within private health insurance, which would have been a huge financial burden to me. So none of these were taken care of by the company. I found a local U.S. based relocation service in the Detroit area. They helped us identify a proper area of living, a proper school district for the boys logistics in terms of whereas where's the German school? What is doable? So I was identifying my needs. I was discussing with my boss. We basically agreed on a on a salary that allowed me to cope with all of those expenses, and that was it. So that was very, very, very hands on. Return is a lot easier. You just go back. I mean, this is from an administrative point of view, this

piece of cake. You agree on a moving company. You transfer funds maybe. And that's it. So returning was what is ten times easier going there and not having a clue and not having much support. What is necessary for my health insurance from a pension scheme point of view? Everything, social Security contribution. How to continue while you are abroad to keep up with the need so you don't suffer in the long run upon retirement. All that I had to figure out myself. We didn't run into any trouble. There were a lot of fiddle battles. And luckily we missed them all. But there wasn't much support.”

Researcher: “Did you had to look for a house also on your own or did you had your house here? What was what did it mean for the schools, for your kids? I mean, it's kind of the same procedure, but, yes, it's your home location where you're coming back.”

Candidate F: “Which makes it a lot easier. So on leaving we kept the house and rented it to each person and the person luckily left on the date. So we were able to we moved into our house again. Boys returned to the same school again. They had to repeat their last grade, of course. But other than that, it was it was really returning home in all its positive ways. So there wasn't any there was any burden really on that at from a personal point of view.”

Researcher: “When you came back, you felt any kind of acceptance from your colleagues sides. Were they happy that you were coming back? Was there kind of appreciation that you were maybe teaching them something you would you have learned? How was their relationship to your colleagues on your way back?”

Candidate F: “I didn't expect much. And my expectations were met, to put it all very positive. It's a company where most of the people I was working with, people reporting to me or people in my sales environment, they are all with the company for many, many, many years. And, of course, me returning I was kind of the weird guy, they still knew everything better and there wasn't much appreciation. Which where again? Putting me into that position of being the manager of the

others who were still suffering the same way as I experience while I was abroad. They perfectly understood and they perfectly understood the value I was bringing, my capabilities of being more mind wise, being on their side, but being at headquarters. That was perfect to that. So I was a huge value to them in this role. My former colleagues, the local headquarter colleagues, they couldn't care less. I was more a threat than anything else. So there wasn't this culture of appreciating and OK, what can I learn? How is it? They were still very stubborn and these are all stupid guys out there and why do we even keep those subsidiaries? Why do we just not focus on Germany and get rich and that's it. But I didn't expect anything, so. It is what it is.”

Researcher: “So maybe like you are already a bit cautious about what how they would react because you knew them quite well. And you kept your expectations low and made the process of getting back in and not believing that they wouldn't appreciate something from you made it easier.”

Candidate F: “And so from a management team point of view, I mean, this whole development of returning made me grow into becoming one of them, a member of the overall management team reporting into one of the two VP's. On management level there was enough appreciation. So it was more on the pier and sales level or sales supporting functions where the piers, the day to day people didn't really buy into my learnings, and, yes, I kept my expectation low. I was rather focusing on developing the teams abroad be more efficient, being more focused so that at least results could buy a little more a little more appreciation, a little more respect and reward for them. So I decided to have numbers and results and turning them positive being that the key objective for me and maybe that would have would have bought a little more respect from the working level at headquarters.”

Researcher: “OK. Do you have any other aspect that has an impact on why you decided to stay with the company after you came back? Apart from that, you got the job that you expected at least.”

Candidate F: “I wouldn't even say the job I expected, but it was a natural progression taking it to the next level, So that really, really was perfect. It perfectly matched my appreciation of international business, I was able to travel a lot. I was able to live through very substantially different business cultures, China, Korea, various areas in Europe, northern Europe, France, Italy, Poland, the U.S. again, of course, so extremely diverse, which I love. So that was that was perfect. I never felt as positive in my job as I felt upon my return, except those experiences in the states of my I was fantastic. But from a from a business perspective, from and feeling the impact that I can have on the company's progression on company success, it was extremely rewarding in my position on to I never felt as positive as I ever did, I think throughout my whole career. So the more pissed I was when all that when the went down based on my boss leaving and then having everything changing. Quite a part of that is that the job we found was perfectly matching my interests and my affection. And yes, it was a natural progression based on my on my job abroad. It wasn't a proper plan, no, it was a very, very positive consequence and it was a need at that time. But it wasn't it wasn't planned for in the long run.”

Researcher: “Do you think that family factors can also have an impact on your decision making to stay with the company?”

Candidate F: “I don't think so. In our case, family was returning back to normal. The boys returned to school, to their school. Yes, they had to adopt two different classes. But besides that, they were returning back to the normal and if that would have had any impact, you more lean towards the usual problems. Is family coping with the amount of travel you're doing your job, or are you successful in your new role? Are you very stressed? Day in, day out. And is that putting a burden on family? But this is a normal day to day families struggle you have any weights, regardless of whether you ever had been abroad or not? So, yes, of course you need to feel comfortable with what you're getting targeted with next. And you got to get to have to be happy in

your new role. And then family will be happy, too, if you're not coping, and this is affecting family life then of course, it's the wrong decision. But that could happen anyways, regardless of where you placed. Let's say I would have been with a bigger company and they took the position that that would have been logical based on my capabilities now would have been at a different site. And I would have had to get a lot of travels. I would have had to relocate. Yeah, that would have been a downside. But just having headquarters in Hanover and it was the same as on my leave. No impact.”

Researcher: “Would you say that your adjustment process back to your home country went relatively well? And why?”

Candidate F. “Business wise, it eventually turned out right. Because we were discussing a few options and we tested the water with people being affected by the decision. The returning process, the administrative side, was easy. We were taking care of things our own. I just asked for approval if there was money involved. And then we were moving forward. So there wasn't any involvement from it, from the company point of view into the physical retraining process. Job wise. Yeah, we discussed we had a very, very open discussion based on a very good, very personal level. We were able to discuss and test a few alternatives. And yet one alternative it became obvious that this would not work out based on lack of acceptance of individuals. So we for a while, we were discussing the option on my return that I would be the manager of the key accounts. So not as much territory or responsibility and no direct relation, but instead managing three troublemakers. That would have been taking one burden from my boss, but it wouldn't really have been successful. They wouldn't have accepted me and it wouldn't have been in line with my capabilities that I learned while being abroad. So deciding for that was what is a better option. And that was the only preparation work from company point of view, taking the time of discussing and taking the time forward deciding. And other than that, there wasn't much. Company itself, wasn't involved in the physical way back, no.”

Researcher: “And your adjustment process on your personal side and getting used to all of the old living life. How did it go?”

Candidate F: “It was interesting, we were returning 2016. So keep in mind that we were abroad while there was all the refugees coming in 2015. So you're in North America, country that is that is openly welcoming everyone from everywhere around the world and you have an extreme diverse population. The school, the boys we're going to they claimed there would have been 55 languages being spoken at home, across the whole school families. And then you come back and you hear everyone moaning about hears too many refugees and this stupid Merkel and she has no clue what she's been buying into. That was that was an experience in itself. So, yes. Do you think there's a bit of distance that rose while you are abroad and that melts down over time. That is Betties now looking back. That is my experience. Initially, there was a lot of things where you were kind of, well, there's a few things they do better over there. At some point in time, you get back into the usual routines. Though, I mean, it was it was all positive. We had a great stay over there, which is in itself a positive remembering that you carry when you come back, you're coming back. You're happy to be with friends again, with family again. You see that having your boys reintegrating here works out just the way they were nicely integrating over there, so everything works out really. Nothing to worry about. Nothing to bother with. It was extremely positive. But again, there wasn't a time management from third party, and it could have been it could have been bad in some financial way. If I wouldn't have found out before eating.”

Researcher: “OK, very well. I think I have let's say all my questions may be questions that I had to ask. Thank you very much.”

Candidate F: “You're welcome. Any time. Thank you. You know, if there's anything you want on your when you're writing, if it should get to a point where you want questions, just let me know. More than happy. You need to keep in mind the way, the way I look at my job, that probably is a factor that you need to consider. I want to do a job that

is rewarding. That meets my capabilities. And that allows me to develop grow and as soon as one of those is not is not really met, then I'm considering to leave. So did you check out my LinkedIn profile? You got to see there's that's a lot of jobs, but they are either progressions within one company, so different jobs in the same company or in quite a good three cases. I was with one company and then over time that got bought out by a second company. And in all those cases, I was carefully watching what is the new circumstances. And in two out of three, it was amazing. And I had new opportunities and I loved to stay and I love to take the next step and maybe others from the same company they were scared and they changed jobs or they were just negative in what to expect. I took the opportunities and they allowed me to grow. In one of the three cases, the new owner was just not, it wasn't my way of business and I very quickly decided this is not the right call for me, so let's move on. So I'm a type of guy. If key criteria is not met anymore, I'm not scared of taking consequence and moving on, which is a key factor. I don't have, Bayer or so is probably paying a nice pension, private pension, company pension. I never had that. So these are these are benefits that wouldn't it would never keep me from moving on. So I'm always looking for the next challenge I'm always looking for are my capabilities, honoured and put into play for the benefit of the company. Can I have an impact? As soon as I see people don't even understand what I can bring to the table. Or as soon as I see that people for other reasons cut me in my responsibilities because they are scared of me, or I want to put someone else to a position where they believe they can better trust or make a better influence. OK. We might have an issue there. So my motivations may be different from other people. My motivation is really always and it doesn't matter if it's expatriation and repatriation, it doesn't matter. I'm always looking for being honoured in what I'm doing. And if that's not the case, I would move on. So and this is what I did after three years when this setup didn't work out anymore.”

Interview Candidate G

Researcher: “Thank you very much, for participating in my study of my master's thesis and taking your time to do this interview and share some experiences you had during repatriation. Let me introduce you the topic. So the purpose of my study is to identify the motives repatriates have to stay with the company after they returned from their international assignment. As you may know, there are a lot of repatriates who decide to leave the company after they successfully finished their international assignment due to various reasons. While some are leaving, there are still others that stay and I want to understand why they stay. So in order to learn and understand the motives I interview repatriates who stayed. For a company as you know it, it's loss of investment if the person then goes thus I want to identify the reasons and motivations repatriates have to stay.”

Candidate G: “You say they are leaving. What do you mean? In your case, if they're leaving right away before they return to the home country or they return and work couple of months and then after some time they decide that is not what I want and then leave.”

Researcher: “The leaving part is when you come back, so you are back to your home country and then decide to leave your home company, your headquarter for instance. A lot of go to the competitor or wherever you leave the company.”

Candidate G: “But you leave from your home country?”

Researcher: “Yes, you have successfully finished your international assignment and come back and than you decide to leave or to stay. So maybe you can start that you introduce yourself. Tell me about your international assignment. If you have been there with your family for how long? Where?”

Candidate G: “I was abroad three years in Shanghai. Between 2011 and 2014. I was there with my entire family, so with my spouse and two kids.”

Researcher: “So in total, it was then three years that your stayed there. Right?”

Candidate G: “Yes, I was expatriate in China.”

Researcher: “What was your motivation to go abroad?”

Candidate G: Honestly speaking, I wanted to do that all of my life, maybe not specifically China, but I always had the interest to live abroad. The problem I had in my younger career years, so to say that most of the people go abroad, I was spending a lot of time, 8, 10 years in the Merger & Acquisitions business. And with that, I mean, you you're travelling more or less all the time. And as I was doing it maybe for a bit too long I missed somehow the opportunity. I have seen more or less all the countries but I missed somehow opportunity really to live abroad. After changing from or switching away from Merger & Acquisition, there was a discussion that I go to Hong Kong and I discussed with my wife and we already agreed to go to Hong Kong but then it didn't materialize. So that was then another missed opportunity so to say. And then when there was the chance to go to China, I think my case, I was quite happy about it. I mean, anyway, I wouldn't say we had no chance. But we were transferring an entire business or the global headquarters from the company, from Germany to Shanghai. And of course, with that, all the top managers, more or less were, I wouldn't say were forced, that's the wrong word because you can't force somebody. But it was somehow expected that you go with a business, especially in my case, as I was project lead for the headquarter relocation, it was pretty clear that I go with the business. I have to say I enjoyed it. I always wanted to live abroad. I had a little bit concerns of my family and even more concerned at the beginning about China and maybe you know the topic about pollution and so on. I was familiar with the country also beforehand, quite a lot. I was travelling 20, 30 times beforehand already to China, but the really living there with all the pollution and so on. So there were some concerns also with the family. But overall, I think I had strong motivation to go there just living in different culture. I've always somehow felt attracted to Asia, I have to say so. So all of my life, if I would have to choose to, for example, work in the U.S. or work in

China, Thailand, Hong Kong, wherever. I would always choose to volunteer in Asia because of the speed, the flexibility and all the things I simply like it.”

Researcher: “How did your company prepare you to go abroad? What measures that they take?”

Candidate G: “Well, we had a kind of inter cross-cultural training, But at the end, you cannot take that seriously. So it was two days of training which was quite generic. I mean, if I would not have had the experience with all my travels to Asia beforehand, I would have been lost because these 3 days of training, I mean, could have helped maybe a little bit at the beginning if you had no attachment to China at all. But it was on such a low level that it would have been difficult. So this was not sufficient preparation, I would say for a normal case. And of course, we also were eligible to get some language and language training. Which I also did. I think it was quite comprehensive but it was very short. I think it was one or two weeks intensive language training in a small group with 3 or 4 people, so you could get some communication skills, some basic language and training during this two weeks, that was not too bad, but with every language and maybe even more specific for Chinese language, of course, I totally failed when I went to China and I tried to apply my language skills. So I have to say, nobody could understand me. And I think in theory I could have also get additional training. I mean, this was offered by the company. I mean, you have to ask for it. Of course you could have a longer period of time one hour once a week or so, I think it was at least offered. I didn't take it due to two reasons. The first reason was within a newly headquarters set up I had simply no time to do that because it was quite intensive. And the second reason I had good friends that spent 10, 20 years already in China and they're really able to speak the Chinese language and they gave me the recommendation that if you want to really do it, then learn it every day, so then you can use it somehow, but if you just want to speak one, two hours a week, just let go because it doesn't help anything. Maybe with another

language but not with Chinese. This is simply a waste of time. And as I said, they have all long experience and I then decided to not pursue this offer any further was any way not that necessary. Of course, it makes sense if you live there for a longer period of time, but the entire office language was English and then everybody in the company was able to speak English.”

Researcher: “In what other aspects did your company support you when going abroad?”

Candidate G: “We had kind of a pre-trip. Where you could together with your wife take a look at the city you're supposed to live and look for a house. So that you are getting a little bit familiar and that also your partner can get a feeling for the adventure that you are embarking on. I think that was pretty good. It was five, six days. But as you were supposed to already select a house during this trip, I mean, there's not plenty of time really take a look at the country. So it's quite speedy week. But at least it was it was kind of spend it. All this relocation topic and support that was not what you want to get, I mean, you had to take care more or less for everything on your own in order to make sure it worked out. So the company selected to help you with the expatriation, that was maybe not that good at this point in time. So you had to spend a lot of additional effort in organising yourself. “

Researcher: “Let's focus then on your repatriation. How did it differ from your expatriation process?”

Candidate G: “I mean, you have one difficulty when you repatriate, the problem is simply that you have to find a job first. In our case, where we were going with the relocation of the global headquarter, it was clear right in the beginning, that there is no senior position in this business anymore when you go back, because all the senior managers have been transferred to China so it was already clear in the beginning, you have to find a new job in the home company, but you have to find it in a totally different business area. I have to say that was a big concern. I mean there were 30 or 40 people at the very end that

relocated with me the same point in time and for everybody was clear that if you are going now, there will be hard challenge if all the people of the two, three, four years wants to come back because this business is not existent anymore in Germany. And there I mean, that is maybe one additional thing the company provided, that was helpful at the very end for most of the people, the company gave a clear commitment that they take would take care once you go back that you will find a decent job.”

Researcher: “This commitment how did it look like? And when did they gave you this commitment? “

Candidate G: “Before you went abroad. It was a long discussion because I think in the beginning it was not on the radar screen of the board. But then, of course, there was the feedback that many people said, hey, look, we are transferring an entire business and it's the first time in the company's history that we are doing that. And have you ever thought about the problem that not everybody is being able to come back. Yeah, I think it was not that much of the attention in beginning because it was the first time and people didn't think about it in the beginning. But, of course, if you talk to people and you want to convince them, not only for top management, also for all the other people, that were moving you have to convince them to come with you. And it was pretty clear that somehow the commitment is really important. So at one point in time, then this commitment was also given that they take care and so on. And then it was much more easy for many people because that's said, OK, with this commitment, of course, the company cannot guarantee us certain jobs because nobody knows how the structure looks in three years. But this general commitment, we take care, don't worry. That was quite helpful and the commitment was given right away from the board, so that was a relief for many people. I would say.”

Researcher: “How exactly did the commitment looked in regard to the job position? Something like, you will at least have the same position as

you had abroad. You will get a higher position? In what direction did it go?"

Candidate G: "I mean, in legal terms, you would say best efforts, but we do all our best that we do best effort and we commit that you find an adequate job. Of course, there was no guarantee for a certain job. There was no guarantee for a higher job grade or higher salary. It was more the commitment for fair treatment. We find something. Don't worry if you go, we will honour that. "

Researcher: "What did you expect when the company said, that they will find an adequate job for you?"

Candidate G: "Two things. It has to be a job that I want to do so, I have some fun with it, because, it's really boring to do something that you don't like. I would have a certain expectation to the job grade. I would not do a job that would be below my previous one. I think you cannot always expect that's going up and up. Even if you are high in the organisation it even Harder and harder to get higher every time. But yet you find something on a comparable base/level. I think that was my expectation. I have to say it work for nearly all of the people. It was much easier on lower management level, because there is a simply broader mass. I would say it was much harder on top management level because there's only a handful of jobs. For me it was clear that we go back after 3 years and then I agreed with the board right away. That was related to the working contract of my wife because she was working at this point in time and she didn't want to quit the job just because we go to China. She was able to negotiate with her company, a normal contract for three years, but it was really limited for three years. So that was also why I said I go and I am fine, I happy to go but I am back in three years. And knowing that, I have to say, I already started to look for a new assignment. I would say after two years. And I have to say it also took some time because going on a high management level to a different business, that's not there tomorrow. I mean, you have to discuss with the board and everything. And to really make it fixed this can take more than half a year I would

say. So you have to start early. So this is maybe also something that in our case or in our company case, what the company doesn't provide at all, at least in my point of view, is some support for your partner. They take care for you but all the tropics as has a partner a job? What is the partner doing when he's coming back? If he's quitting the job? I mean, also on monetary basis, you of course, earn more when you go abroad, because there is some extra money that you get for working outside. But on the other hand, if your partners is not working the entire salary of him is gone. But this is nothing the company would compensate. In many cases it's not a financial business case, to go abroad I mean sometimes you have even less than before. So all what is related to the partner also during the time there I would say that was pretty weak. “

Researcher: “So there you would have expected some more support from the company side?”

Candidate G: “Yes.”

Researcher: “You said that you started to look for a job in your home company after two years being abroad. So in your last year in China, you started to look where you can find a position in the home company. Does it mean that the company was not the first one that came to you and said, well, we should start looking for a job for you? It was you who approached?”

Candidate G: “I think it was a bit both wise. I mean, you should not expect that the company is always ahead of you and it's looking for you. This is not real life in my point of view. Of course, your supervisor has it on the radar screen and is already discussing but the very end it can only work out if you take care also of yourself. So if you are abroad you need the connection and it's not always easy. So for example, if you are only back to Germany every couple of weeks or every two months. You should definitely take your time and maybe talk to Board members, talk to business unit heads and then just figure out what's possible. I would never wait and sit there that somebody is

somehow is solving the job issue for you, because my experience is that in most cases it will never work out. I think it's both the company that takes care but if you do nothing it will also not work, it will have to come from both sides.”

Researcher: “So if I understand it right, at the end you got a job that was at least similar then the one you abroad and it was kind of fitting to your needs or what you would like to do?”

Candidate G: “In my personal case, I was quite happy I even had a better job, so it worked out pretty well. But it was not in all cases. For me personally yes, but there were also people who got a job who were not that satisfied. I mean you have entire spectrum.”

Researcher: “So you being satisfied with the job, was this a reason to decide to stay with the job? Or did you ever had the thought of leaving the company?”

Candidate G: “Yes, I had even pretty good offers to go. There were several reasons why they didn't work out. After I was coming back 2014, I was not even thinking about that. Because I have to say, I like the company and I was very satisfied with the job. So this was at this point in time, not on my mind. I had it on my mind in previous times, but not after my repatriation.”

Researcher: “And this is linked to the job upon your return?”

Candidate G: “The job is definitely something, but I also have to say that especially I think in the first year when you are back it's hard to work back in Germany. Because I wouldn't say the freedom, the flexibility, the working style, if you have the chance to work somewhere else in our case, China I think the entire working environment was much more fun in any regard what then I experience back in Germany, because it's simply different working style, different culture. And then with the experience you made you try also to change something in Germany. And then you figure out how you can always do smaller incremental steps. But it will never be the same. Because it is simply

different. It's rooted so deeply that you cannot really change the entire culture. I think this is especially for people that worked in Asia, that could be a big frustration in my point of view. And I know also people that had this frustration and still have this frustration because work life, not work life balance, because we worked a lot in China. But I mean, the combination of working time with private time that you did also together a lot with the team, you have more open doors, that you're trying new things out, you are much faster. I mean, this is nice. I think, what I experience for me in China from a working perspective it was a little bit of best of both worlds. You have the speed of Asia with the flexibility of the people. They don't do ten analysis beforehand just to try something out. You just try something out. This also was wrong many, many times, but it's okay. I mean, as you're coming from a German headquartered company, you may bring a little bit more structure. This has also some advantages and disadvantages, and I think in this three years there, it's was developing to a working culture where you really can say best of both worlds. So both cultures adapted a bit. And that was pretty unique. And then, of course, you have a big frustration when you come back and then all office doors are closed. Sometimes you don't see your colleague for two days, and you don't know if you're still alive so before you come with some recommendation, you have to do 35 alignment meetings and 26 analysis, because I mean this is totally different. For me this was causing some frustration. For people that live even longer in Asia, this is a really big frustration. And I think the longer you are in those countries, the harder it is to get back and many people decided than more to leave the company or asking if they can have another assignment in Asia because they couldn't deal anymore with the German way of working. I think this could be a frustration, in my point of view, a severe case, why people would leave or trying to go back, and not working in their old environment.”

Researcher: “Did you also face the experience that you have not been able to apply what you have learned abroad and also not able to teach your

colleagues and showing them what you have learned and introducing them that it is possible to do things differently. Was there any appreciation or acceptance culture? “

Candidate G: “I would not say it's total failure. I think you can change something but it is incremental. It goes pretty, pretty slowly. And it takes a lot of time. We have maybe the advantage in the company that many people spend some time in Asia and thus have an idea and like it. So in some cases you could maybe move a little bit quicker, but honestly, it's quite incremental. I can give you an example. If you're going to Shanghai, because we're not always doing those three years assignment, it's sometimes very difficult for the company, it's quite expensive. But we often try to guarantee or to enable someone to get some international experience. We try to come to a three months, four months or six months assignment so that you do not have to relocate. You can work abroad for six months, getting a feeling for the culture, for the working style, for the country. Just to give more people the chance to get some experience. We were sending somebody from Germany to Asia. People always like it. They were taken by the local people and somehow they were integrated. There was a lot of mingling. But we had many cases that didn't work out the other way around. We had Chinese people for six months here and nobody was taking care of. We had even cases where people in the department meeting were talking in German. And this is certain. I can understand that this is causing for many people with a different mind-set and different ideal working style, that this is leading to certain frustration, of course.”

Researcher: “If you could say three aspects that you think are important in the repatriation process in regard to retain repatriates, what would be these three aspects?”

Candidate G: “I think, as I said, for me, the most important thing is the repatriation process that you find your job. Because I mean, this is number one, two and three. Because if this is not working out and you are frustrated than this is a mess. And I think this is causing them pretty

quickly for you, the desire to change or even leave the company, because I also experienced in a couple of cases, most of the people who found certain job, a good job for them, relocation or repatriation was quickly done. What I would recommend everybody what we did, we were keeping our house at this point in time, I would recommend it to people with their kids. I think my kids with 10 and 7 at that time of relocation and you don't want to tear them away from all their friends and their network, because that could also be hard for them to return home. So if you keep the house and the company was also giving some financial support, which I thought was quite good. Your kids are never leaving their network. So then also coming back after three years, four years, also for the kids and the family is no issue at all because they can always spend every year a couple of weeks there. So this is extremely minimizing the family at risk at the very end. I mean, if your family is not happy, you have the right job. Your family is really coming home. And I mean, you can not focus on your work. So I think it should also be in the company's interests that you have a smooth transition."

Researcher: "Exactly. So you could agree that you transition and your adjustment back to the home country was smooth. "

Candidate G: "Yeah, definitely. Having the house makes it much easier I would not say an entire prerequisite, but makes coming back and getting familiarized with your old life much more easy."

Researcher: "After the experience that you have made abroad and coming back. Would you go abroad again? What are your thoughts on going abroad again? "

Candidate G: "It is difficult but I basically would go. And I think also my wife would go. But I would say it would depend on the country. I would not be in a position where I would say I go regardless where so if this is somehow attractive I would do it. But even more important today, what is happening when you are coming back, because the likelihood to get a decent position at this point in time with the environment is

getting more difficult every day. I mean, I am not just talking about COVID but the extreme pressure in the industry to reduce costs. We have significantly less senior positions than before, which of course, means also the likelihood that you go abroad. Because therefore is no more senior position anymore in the world, this is more and more centralized over the last two, three years back in Germany. But once you are abroad I think it is much more difficult to go back at this point in time. Before you have to discuss and agree or at least make up your mind what you do afterwards. I think in the current environment as the last 20 years not only the COVID-19 environment, that would be even important, so I would like to go, but I would say I have a couple of more question marks than the last time definitely.”

Researcher: “How do you think can a company ensure to retain their repatriates?”

Candidate G: “I think they can’t. I mean, they can give you a commitment. But I mean, this world is moving that fast. I mean, structures are changing so quickly. Businesses are coming and going. I think companies would have a hard time really to guarantee you something. I mean, they can give you the commitment, like we will find a job for you but I would doubt if they can do more than this. Maybe in other industries that are much higher margin growth focused. There it might be possible. But in the more traditional industries, I think for companies, it gets more and more difficult. You see it already that, I don't have the statistics now with me, but I think if you would just compare how many people we be sent abroad today, last year and five years ago, you would see a significant decrease. I really don't have the number but I would guess we sent 70 percent less people abroad compared to five years ago. This shows how tough the environment is and that makes also the return even more tough.”

Interview Candidate H:

Researcher: “Welcome, XY. Thank you very much for participating in this interview session and taking your time to share your experiences

about repatriation, because the topic of my thesis is repatriation. So the objective is to find out the motives that repatriates have to stay with the company after they successfully finishing their international assignment. So studies reveal that a lot of repatriate after finishing their international assignments leave the company the first one or two years to do several reasons. And of course, this is a big problem for the companies because at the end it's the loss of investment, the knowledge that the repatriate gained goes away and a lot of companies struggle with it. However, I want to understand why some repatriates stay and what are their reasons to stay and why they stay committed to the company and in order to help companies to retain a higher number of repatriate. So maybe you could start with introducing yourself, your job position where you have been abroad, when you have been abroad, for how long, since when you are back, what was your purpose to go abroad? Like kind of a summary of your international assignment life-cycle.”

Candidate H: “Thank you for the introduction and happy to share some thoughts and some experiences with you. Well, I'm working currently and working for already close to 36 years at a company called XY. This company is producing and marketing and selling raw materials for plastic materials and during the 36 years I have been able to go through various steps in terms of career. I started in the sales office and my first experience abroad was in Portugal where I was responsible for sales in the country. That was a very good experience because I was really close to the customer. I had to somehow understand and really manage the whole process of selling, meeting customers, negotiating, taking care of the orders, and then afterwards also taking care of the payment. So a good experience, a small market, but with a small market you also got quite a good feeling about the market and what a market is and how the market is working and functioning. And so that was a good experience. I did that for three and a half years. I was very lucky because I met my wife there, married there and my wife came back with me to Germany. So let's

say after a good experience, I got an interesting job offer in the headquarters in Leverkusen, which allowed me to further grow and further gain experience. So therefore, I honestly did not have really far to leave the company. They even called me back and said, well, after two years it's time to come back but with the offer I had, I was able to also travel quite a lot. Gain experiences in other European countries was then especially looking into the automotive industry, which at the time was very interesting because the automotive industry was in a quite dramatic change and therefore it was quite an attractive job I could get and that was the reason why I stayed. Then, I was working seven and a half years in the automotive business about seven and a half years was quite a long time and I can tell you, after three or four years, I started to become a little bit concerned about what's going on with my career. How could I developed and I also was quite interesting to go again abroad in order to gain further experience in other countries. And then I started to speak with my supervisors and their relatively early indicate to me in more or less five years that they would see a possibility in Brazil. But then it took another two, two and a half years until finally I could go to Brazil and finally I made it. That time I went with my family to Brazil with my wife and two kids. And Brazil was a really extraordinary experience because it was quite far away or very far away from the headquarters. I was on my own. I had to really take responsibility for business in South America in a market which is much more volatile than the business in Europe, a lot of macroeconomic factors which were very important. And so a completely different environment, a completely different culture and very, very interesting. And then, I was prepared to stay there quite, some time ago and found the country interesting and still a lot of things to do. But after two years, I really got a very interesting offer, which was also giving me the possibility to make a big career step. Therefore, I went back and took over the job in a central function in procurement or really heading the procurement at Biopolymers, which was really a completely different function, also a good career development, direct contact to the board of the

company and from that point of view that was a onetime chance. And I couldn't say no and from that point, it was clear that, yes, I should take this onetime chance in order to really do something for my career. For my family it was not so easy to say bye bye to Brazil because my wife is being Portuguese she felt quite good there and the kids love Brazil. But nevertheless, we decided, yes, we have to take the opportunity. And then from a private point of view coming back, we had a house already in Germany. Kids could go to the school and to kindergarten. So that was also relatively easy. And then the third opportunity came quite some years later in 2011, so I came back from Brazil two thousand three. In between, after four years of procurement, I got another really good opportunity in the polycarbonate business, taking over the responsibility for the commodity business and really also then being responsible for the whole supply chain for production, logistics, supply chain overall and marketing and sales responsibility. That was, again, a good opportunity for me to develop myself. But then we got a challenge, which because in the strategic process, we decided that we should move the headquarters to Asia because the market moved, or big parts of the market were moving overseas to Asia Pacific. And in order to really be as a market leader in the center of the business, it was decided to move to Asia and in this case to Shanghai in order to build up the headquarters in Shanghai. That of course, was again a big opportunity. I had to convince my family to go with me, my wife was in the beginning, not very enthusiastic about going there. My kids also were a little bit sceptical, but my daughter was very clear about it. Then finally we decided but we were in this typical situation. We just had built a new house, the house was just read, we were about one year in the house and then we had to take the decision to move to Shanghai it took another year until we finally moved out, but it was now somehow a decision where I was a little bit more concerned about coming back. And therefore, I said I do not want to rent out my house because this building up the headquarter was a certain adventure and nobody was really clear how this would work out and

whether this would really work and therefore, I was somehow insisting on having some subsequent securities and some warranties in case we would have to come back. So one thing was I didn't want to rent out my house in order to have it really available when we would be back. I was able to somehow find an agreement also financial wise to get a certain coverage in order to somehow not have financial losses by not renting out the house and I also was saying, due to the education of my kids and especially the education of my daughter, it was clear that after three years I would have to come back because that would be the time when my daughter would make a final exam and then somehow a decisive point where she should come back in order to decide about the further career going to university or what so ever. So therefore, I made an agreement with my employer that not only there would be some extra financial support, but also made the agreement that they would have to ensure that I have an adequate position when I'm coming back after three years. So during the three years in Shanghai was definitely a good experience. My family liked it and felt quite well. My son perhaps not that much. But overall, we had a good life there. My job was really interesting. I could gain a lot of experience in this very dynamic market, but I had to start quite early to somehow by my boss on well, in three years I have to be back or in one year or two years I have to be back. Just please prepare and please just look out where I could get a decent job and a good job in the headquarters. And yes, this was not so easy. Finally, there was a job that was acceptable for me, and after three years we definitely went back. I even had to go back a little bit earlier and was commuting between Shanghai and Germany for half a year. That worked out quite well. I could stay at home because the home was empty. At the end of the day my employer committed to giving me an adequate job when returning to Shanghai and therefore more or less all promises were fulfilled. I had a job and of course, my home where we could move in without any problems immediately, no big moves of furniture and so on. So from that point of view the circumstances on the professional side and the circumstances on the

private side were somehow provided and therefore for a good reason to go back.”

Researcher: “You said that you were reminding your boss about finding an adequate job position upon your return. Could you define or describe what you mean under adequate job? What characteristics should it entail and what have been your expectations in regarding to the job?”

Candidate H: “So the expectations I had were a job on a certain salary level, that was point number one, second thing to have responsibility also for personnel also having responsibility for a bigger business, ideally having direct reporting line to the business unit head. That last one did not really work out because due to some special constellations in this business unit, there was a position in between that it was somehow an artificial position that was created for a colleague of mine. I had to somehow accept this position for one year and then afterwards I was reporting directly to the head of the business unit. So from that point of view, there are two and a half out of three conditions were fulfilled and that was acceptable for me.”

Researcher: “If you could rate these conditions, which one would have been the most important one?”

Candidate H: “That's a good question. I think somehow keeping the salary level and having responsibility for personnel for me was always very important and of course, also the responsibility for the business.”

Researcher: “OK, very good. Did you also have the expectations that you wanted to apply what you have learned abroad on your job back in the home country?”

Candidate H: “Of course but I didn't have the expectation that I would want now use this experience. Somehow have a deep belief that you are using this kind of experience and intrinsically it is somehow you have this experience, so once you talk about the Asian market, you have a completely different idea as somebody who has never been in Asia Pacific or never lived in Asia Pacific, but when we were talking about

Asia, I exactly had an idea about what this means when we talk about new investments, when we talk about personnel, that when we talk about reliability of assets and people and so on.”

Researcher: “Would you agree that one motivation to stay with the company after having returned from an international assignment is definitely the job position that you have?”

Candidate H: “Yeah, definitely, I think the position is something important, and as I meant, it was one of the three topics that were important for me. You just want to have the impression that the investment you did for yourself and with your family and going abroad and also accepting a lot of change, that this is somehow coming out now. And today we have sometimes the situation that has become even worse over the last years, that I see a lot of situations where expats are coming back and where everybody's like, oh, my God, what are we going to do with the expats? And this kind of situation I never wanted to be in because I think it is a big investment into the expat that the company is doing and unless it is completely failing, I think it's really worth to build on his experience and to develop the expat in his home country again.”

Researcher: “Why do you think that this happens and why does it happen more nowadays?”

Candidate H: “Yeah, it has something to do with the cost pressure many companies have. There is a huge pressure in order to reduce costs, but that you only can do when you reduce structures. Hierarchies are becoming much flatter, positions are consolidated. And with that, just a huge number of positions are just disappearing. And then suddenly the people are coming back. The people are very knowledgeable but then you have other people sitting on on the job which remained there and that makes it then difficult to find something for somebody. I see more and more situations where people are somehow parked on certain project jobs and have to somehow be patient until the right and adequate position is going to be available. In such a situation, I

definitely would have looked into options and opportunities outside of the company.”

Researcher: “I mean, you have been three times abroad and the first time you've been abroad and came back, you were able to grow in your career later, the second time was the same. Twice you were able to get a position higher. You had this expectation also on your third time or how did it differ from your last international assignment?”

Candidate H: “So the last move was definitely a parallel move. So not moving up again, a position. But, yeah, these positions, there were just a handful of positions. And the probability on getting such a job, I knew was very low. So I think I also was somehow managing quite well my expectations and therefore I was realistic enough to understand that this kind of immediate and fast move would not be possible.”

Researcher: “Do you think that this is an important advice to give to expatriates that they should bear in mind to keep their expectations managed or not as high in order to reduce their frustration when they are coming back and maybe are not getting an upgrade?”

Candidate H: “Well, I think it's very important that the expats are accompanied by a kind of home manager over the time they are there. It's very important that the home manager is staying in contact, is maintaining a constant dialogue that he somehow is also giving feedback what he's seeing about the person in the job abroad, a little bit reflecting, how is the situation or how is it going? Sometimes you hear something and you can give him feedback, give him a good hint, some recommendations, some help. I think it's also important to somehow manage expectations what's possible and what is not possible. You also have to see that the company is in different, might go through some cyclical businesses. You have good times you have bad times, sometimes are easy for coming back and some other times are more difficult. And here I think it is important to somehow stay in a good dialogue with the expat in order to manage expectations. I think especially today when you have this constant pressure and the

reduced number of positions. It's important that the expat knows what's going on. But what you also see is not only that you have this process of consolidation and rationalisation of structures, but what you also see is that, of course, certain functions are changing, that new kind of functions are coming up. For example, you know, everybody is talking about digitalisation and suddenly over time, the profiles are changing. You need new capabilities and it might be that you have capabilities that are more or less reflecting the traditional business model you had. But suddenly you need to also new capabilities that you have not yet been able to. And also there I think it's important that you keep this kind of dialogue so that you eventually also have your job abroad, the possibility to get in touch with new capabilities you should build a new competence.”

Researcher: “How often should this communication with the home manager or coach be during your time abroad? And when should this communication start?”

Candidate H: “Well, it should start definitely before the one is going out. And then it depends a little bit, I think having such a talk every half a year would definitely be good. It depends a little bit on the situation when people are adapting themselves very easily. But you also have situations where people are not adapting themselves that fast, and then it's better you have more frequent contact with them. Sometimes it might even be that you talk to them on a weekly basis because you are still in the day to day business relationship with them, then it's even easier. But somehow, it's important that you also, even when you have day to day contact with them, that you say, OK, let's put the business apart and now let's talk. How are you doing? How is your family doing? Is everything working out as planned? How do you feel yourself in the position with the colleagues, what are a positive experience, negative experience and so on and so on. But also telling them what's going on in the headquarter, what is happening in the organization, what kind of jobs are being created and so on.”

Researcher: “Did you experience such communication when you were abroad?”

Candidate H: “Definitely not on a regular basis. I would say during the time I was in Portugal, there was no dialogue at all. The time I was in Brazil, I had quite a good link to the head of the business unit and I was part of the management team already. That was definitely helpful and also gave me quite a quite a good visibility. And finally, I think that visibility in that contact to the management committee helped me to then get this job in procurement. In Shanghai, my supervisor was with me in Shanghai, and so I was in very close contact with him. I had business contacts to Germany, but there, I have to say, due to the special cancellation, my supervisor was somehow sitting with me in Shanghai.”

Researcher: “But you didn't had contact with someone that was sitting in Germany?”

Candidate H: “Not so much. Nobody who was really accompanying my development in China.”

Researcher: “Especially if you move the headquarters to another country and you might face uncertainties when you come back in regard to find a job upon your return. You were mentioning something like a commitment from the company. Can you explain it a bit more in detail?”

Candidate H: “It was a special situation because it was the first time for the company to really move the headquarters from Germany, which for the group at the time was the center of the universe. So really saying we are courageous and we now move the headquarters to Asia into China with all the specific challenges you have there was for the company quite a pioneer project. And therefore nobody knew how this would work out. Nobody really knew what kind of challenges we would have there. Fortunately, it worked out and it worked out quite well. And I think we as a team also have been able to create a good start of the of the headquarter together with our Chinese colleagues and a lot of these colleagues also were new colleagues. So fortunately, it turned out quite well, but we didn't know what we were

meeting and seeing in Shanghai. Therefore, for me, it was important to have this commitment on a kind of return ticket. And then also kind of first class return ticket, because with that feeling of, yes, I have a return ticket you are more independent to do the right and eventually also the right, brave and courageous decisions sometimes you sometimes have to make when you are working in such an environment. And I think having this kind of return ticket was very helpful for me, but also for the for the entire team.”

Researcher: “So your overall adjustment to the host company, have you been satisfied with the adjustment? Have you adjusted well, how was the process?”

Candidate H: “I had the chance to try to learn Chinese, I was having a Chinese course, intensive course at the Chinese Institute. But that honestly, it was too early because we were moving to China in August and we had this course in April. And you cannot learn Chinese when you have three, four months in between, but at least it was somehow an inside. And that was one experience we also had some cultural lessons, we also had some cultural lessons together with the families, there was quite some quite good support with the moving company or with the company, which was somewhat organizing the move that worked out relatively well. And from that point of view, it was a relatively easy arrival in.”

Researcher: “Upon your return, did you face any difficulties in regard to your personal adjustment, so your general living adjustment?”

Candidate H: “As I said, we could return to our house that was quite easy. We had a challenge to find the right school for my son. That was not so easy, so we had to contact a number of schools and finally we also had to make a compromise because the most preferred school was not accepting my son. At the end of the day everything worked out well, but that was perhaps the most difficult and slightly annoying part of our return. The not so much satisfying part of our return.”

Researcher: “Did the company support you in some way by giving a hand to find the right school?”

Candidate H: “No, there was no support at all. We went back to our hometown. So we somehow knew which schools there would be, but the whole dialogue and the whole contact to the school was done by ourselves. Apart from that, we adjusted very well so we could come back into our house, we just had to somehow arrange Internet and telephone. Most of the furniture was there. The neighbours were the same we had before. So that was really easy. But I also have to say that is also an extraordinary situation and not the situation you normally have. I also had situations when we came back from Brazil. The house we were living in was still rented out at the time. I was lucky that I could somehow cancel the contract earlier and they were leaving earlier and we had a support in an intermediate department from the company, which worked out quite well, because then we also were able to do some renovation work while we were living in the intermediate apartment. So that was OK. And that on that side, we had quite a good support from the company at the time.”

Researcher: “In regard to the work adjustment did you face any difficulties there? Let's say your new job position, the role, your head, the responsibilities, the relationship with your colleagues?”

Candidate H: “There was one situation that I mentioned that we had this artificial position between myself and the head of the business unit, so there was one position in between and that was my direct boss, I didn't have any problems with him, but we had a strange constellation because I was not a full member of the of the management committee. This meant I could participate in some of the meetings or parts of the meeting and then I had to go out, which was very annoying because everybody was sitting there and you were the only one where we had to leave. Not nice. And that was the only point where I thought how long are you able to live with this consultation? Fortunately, my direct boss was a nice guy and I did very well with him. And I also

told him, that this consultation is for me nothing, which I will accept for a longer period of time. Then after one year, the situation will.”

Researcher: “Could you come up with your motivations to stay with the company?”

Candidate H: “I think the first 2 times I had very good opportunities after the assignment to develop in the company and to learn new things, especially when I came back from Brazil, moving into procurement was a completely new experience and that is kind of a one-time experience that you better take such a chance. The third time abroad, I was in the first year after the international assignment not so happy, although as I had the commitment also salary wise no problem but also on the other side I had already achieved a salary level where it would have been easy to find an adequate job with the same payment outside the company. And this is a calculation I also did, which is at the end what are you going to risk now. Are you taking a job that is paid not that well, do you eventually have to move and your family again has to move and go out of the house that we just had built. So the hurdle to do something else was quite high so and I think I was not even close to the point where you get over this hurdle. Even if you then have an opportunity outside you have to balance it with your private life. So imagine I would have received an offer from Munich. But then moving your family to Munich and then looking for the real estate prices and then suddenly you have to move to a smaller house because everything is so expensive there and then you have the question does it really pay off. And here you have to definitely find the right balance, depending on the education situation of your kids, it depends on what your wife is doing, so these are all factors that you have to take into consideration when you take such a kind of decision.”

Researcher: “With all the experiences that you made abroad and coming back, would you go abroad again?”

Candidate H: “In principle yes, but it is a family question. Perhaps not that much around the kids but around the parents. Thinking a lot about what is the best to compromise between career and the family. But in principle

why not. But I mean the number of positions has increased a lot and there is only a handful of positions that might be available so therefore I know how to manage my expectations and the chance to get such an opportunity is really low.”